RITUAL STATES IN THE LIFECYCLES OF HINDU WOMEN IN A VILLAGE OF CENTRAL INDIA

by

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ABSTRACT

The thesis describes the ritual states women are in at different stages in their lives and examines these states in terms of their significance as expressions of gender ideology. It is based on the findings of fieldwork conducted in a village in the Malwa region of Central India, and supplemented with references to other work on the region and to studies of other regions of the sub-continent.

The varying ritual states looked at together with statements from informants and observations of female behaviour express the social construction of what it is to be female. The way in which female sexuality is represented is discussed. An analysis of the material suggests that sexuality is separated into two aspects: one which can be called 'social' and which is positively evaluated and one which is called 'physical' which is negatively evaluated. These aspects are expressed in different ritual states but the links between them lead to an understanding of the alterations in a woman's ritual states and to an overall view of women's powers in relation to the sacred.

Women's ritual states are also closely associated with their position in the kinship system. Positive aspects of their femaleness are usually expressed unequivocally with regard to their natal kin but their ritual states with regard to their conjugal kin are more ambiguous. On occasion the negative aspects of femaleness are expressed ritually by a woman being regarded as polluting and dangerous.

CONTENTS

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A NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

I have followed common English practice in rendering of Indian words, phrases and place names. If such words and phrases have become so naturalised into the English language as to appear in the Concise Oxford Dictionary then the dictionary spelling is used. Otherwise the word or phrase is presented underlined with diacritics the first time it appears and thereafter simply underlined without diacritics. A full list of all common words and phrases used is given with diacritics in the glossary at the end of the text. The names of common rituals are treated in the same way as other common words and phrases.

The transliteration used follows that set out by R.S. MacGregor in his Outline of Hindi Grammar (Oxford University Press 1972). Where authors using different systems of transliteration have been quoted the transliterated form of the word which they use has been left unaltered in the quotation.

Caste names have not been rendered with diacritics or underlining. Place names that are common in English usage are rendered in their familiar form, thus Ganges not Ganga. Names of deities are written with diacritics the first time they appear and are included in the glossary. The appropriate diacritics for the names of festivals are given in appendix 2, otherwise the names of festivals are left without diacritics or underlining.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter begins with a brief outline of the main arguments advanced. These are then elaborated under various headings in order to set them in the context of work done in previous studies and to explain theoretical assumptions which underly them. The chapter concludes with a description of the fieldwork during which the material was collected, and a brief discussion of how the evidence in each chapter relates the argument as a whole.

OUTLINE OF THE ARGUMENT

The thesis examines the symbolism of the altering ritual states of Hindu women in a village in Central India at different stages of their lives and during different events. The interpretation of symbolism rests on the assumption that key cultural values are expressed in ritual. The interpretation of meaning implicit in the ritual is supplemented by statements of men and women and observations of behaviour. The material is used to explore the social construction of perceptions of female behaviour.

The analysis suggests that women have two sorts of power associated with their capacity to produce children. One type of power is almost entirely associated with the physical process of birth and the physical functions of the female body. I shall refer to this power as physical sexuality. This kind of female power has low status and is seen as impure. The second kind of power I have termed social sexuality. Although it is an analogue of physical sexuality it is more or less divorced from actual physical processes. It is the power that makes the status of motherhood honourable and desirable. It is also the power that gives women important

roles in life-cycle and calendrical rituals. Women's altering ritual states depend upon the kind of female power ~~that~~ they are associated within given situations..

Women's social sexuality is concerned with their part in giving individuals a position in 'the moral community' (see Bloch and Guggenheim 1981: 380 and below). This is an aspect of existence which is distinct from physical existence per se. It is the aspect of existence which gives them adult membership in their society, and in order to achieve this a second or meta-birth takes place. The aspect of female power which is honoured is women's participation in this process. Physical motherhood is given second place. However while men do not control physical birth women can only play a full role in meta-birth if they are married with living husbands. Thus men control women's access to the honoured status that exercising the power of social sexuality brings, even although this power is distinctively female.[1] The relation between physical and social powers is complex and women play a crucial role in mediating between these different aspects of existence. A major theme of the thesis is to show the way in which altering ritual states among women are part of this process of mediation.

There are parallels between aspects of female power as they are expressed symbolically and the power that women are observed to have in other areas of life. This suggests that the social construction of femaleness expressed in ritual reflects and reinforces perceptions of femaleness in these other areas.[2] At the broadest level this correspondence can be seen in the part women play in the economic activities of the community. For example, women's labour is recognised as important by men and women but ultimately women are usually excluded from control and ownership of the most important resources, namely land (cf. Sharma 1978: 260). Women's access to land and the ability to make a significant contribution is controlled

by men; and in the symbolism of ritual, women can only achieve significant power when they are associated with men.

Other ways in which symbolism reflects the position of women in the social structures concern their position in the kinship system and the different roles they occupy as sister, daughter, mother etc. Crosscultural studies of pollution suggest that where the symbolism of bodily processes is associated with elaborate pollution taboos these taboos express 'known dangers of society' (Douglas 1978: 121). It therefore seems significant that in their natal homes, where married women have high status and are seen as posing few threats, their ritual states are rarely associated with pollution and danger. In contrast, in their conjugal households their presence poses more problems since, although they bring the children the household needs to survive, they also create problems in terms of dissension and dissolution within the joint household. It is in their conjugal homes that the polluting physical sexuality is given full expression as well as the honoured social sexuality. This would seem to reflect the problems connected with the incorporation of women into their natal households as well as the benefits they bring.

The notion of the life-cycle is used to organise the presentation of the arguments so that social and physical alterations that take place can be explored together with reference to ritual states. As a whole the thesis demonstrates how definitions of femaleness as they appear in ritual reflect and shape perceptions of women's physical and social functions.

THE INTERPRETATION OF RITUAL

Space precludes a full discussion of this subject, so what follows is a summary of the theoretical assumptions that have been used to interpret ritual states. This analysis of ritual states has been undertaken in the absence of fully articulated beliefs about women and different aspects

of their status, in the village in which fieldwork was done.[3] The observer of life in the village is confronted with a situation where the status accorded an individual woman in her lifetime varies between high and low, and inauspicious and auspicious. At times the ability of women to produce children gives women high status, at other times it associates them with low status polluting powers. Women have the power to pollute men but do not use this power against men and seem to see this aspect of power as dangerous to themselves. Men and women do not seem to be aware of what, to the observer, are inconsistencies or contradictions.[4]

The task of analysis then has been to construct a model which reveals the underlying patterns that give structure to this situation. This task is based on the assumption that values and beliefs are related to one another in a consistent manner, but the way in which they are related is not necessarily immediately obvious to actor or observer. The analogy is between language and grammar.[5] A native speaker may not understand the grammar but he will speak according to grammatical rules. The outsider has consciously to learn the structure of the language. The model developed then, is not the actor's model for the observer has a different perspective. However it does provide a translation[6] which enables outsiders to understand regularities which structure the system.

The term ritual has been used in varying ways by anthropologists. In its broadest sense it has been used to refer to the expressive aspect of almost any action or form of communication (eg. Leach 1954: 10-16). I have used it in a narrower sense taking ritual state to refer to the relation of an individual to what is sacred. I have used the term rituals to refer to sets of actions where an individual is concerned to enter into a particular kind of relation with the sacred. The Durkheimian definition of sacred has been adopted ie., 'the existence of a realm of objects and

practices recognized to be different from the objects and practices of everyday life' (Mair 1965: 198). Polluting and purifying states set individuals apart from the objects and activities of everyday life, thus both these states can be classified as sacred.

'The sacred is not an absolute value but one relative to the situation' (Van Gennep 1960; viii). Objects and people constantly shift in their relation to the sacred so that the realm of the sacred is not a discrete bounded domain. 'The magic circles pivot shifting as a person moves from one place in society to another. The categories and concepts which embody them move in such a way that whoever passes through the various positions of a lifetime, one day sees the sacred where before he has seen the profane or vice versa' (Van Gennep 1960: 13). Van Gennep suggests that much ritual and in particular that connected with lifecycle rites is concerned with 'pivoting the sacred' (ibid.) in relation to objects and people.

The question then arises as to why this pivoting should occur. Writers such as Turner (1969) and Richards (1956) have suggested that rituals reaffirm and reinforce norms concerning key roles in society. 'They are also informed with purposiveness and have a conative aspect' (Turner 1969: 43); that is they are part of a society's creation of its values as well as an expression of them. As an individual moves through the positions that the lifecycle involves, rituals may mark and create change and act as evocations of the norms associated with new roles. Das writes 'Thus the concept of the sacred as Durkheim conceived it separates out the domain of discourse from other types of discourse and bestows society with an axiomatic taken-for-granted cognitive quality. The historically crucial part of religion in legitimizing particular institutions of society as axiomatic is best explained in terms of the unique capacity to locate human phenomena in a cosmic frame of reference. This process of cosmization

bestows inherently precarious and transitory constructions of human activity with security, durability and permanence' (Das 1976: 247). An extension of this argument is that ritual also bestows sex roles with an axiomatic quality and this is an assumption underlying the arguments put forward below.

The symbols of ritual obtain their meaning in the context of their relation to other symbols since systems of classification are built up on the relation of symbolic items and categories to one another.[7] Therefore to understand the full meaning of pollution taboos we have to analyse their relation to non polluting states. Existing analyses of pollution beliefs about Indian women have tended to concentrate on pollution, without looking at its relation to purity. Where possible I have tried to look at ritual symbols in their relation to one another in order to show how symbolism such as that of silence and seclusion gains its meaning from its opposition to noise and lack of seclusion.

The relation of one symbol to another necessitates looking at how symbols are used outside a particular ritual context on the grounds that the symbol is likely to be used consistently throughout the culture. This does <u>not</u> mean that one symbol will always mean the same thing wherever it occurs - but rather that it will always stand in a similar relation to other symbols. Thus noise will be the opposite of silence, pollution of purity etc. The oppositions can give clues to the meanings so that although at birth liminality is symbolized by silence, at marriage and death there is noise. the symbolic opposition is between physical birth on the one hand and marriage and death on the other. This expresses something about the meanings of the symbols surrounding birth.

The interpretation of ritual symbols is supplemented by informants' expressed beliefs and explanations about particular subjects where these were forthcoming. This kind of evidence has been included because the behaviour and

statements of the informants are assumed to follow the underlying patterns and structures discerned in the rituals. The explanation of ritual symbolism complements the analysis of articulated beliefs and observed behaviour.[8]

PREVIOUS STUDIES OF INDIAN WOMEN

Until the 1970s it was common for anthropologists to discuss women in India in terms of the principles of purity and pollution which they see as structuring the caste system and those marriage arrangements which structure the kinship system (eg. Yalman 1963; Harper 1964; Van der Veen 1971). In such monographs the position of women is described as ritually and jurally inferior to men. They are described as living almost entirely in the domestic sphere, the minimal institutions and modes of activity that are organised round mothers and children. In 1977 Srinivas pointed out that despite detailed village studies of men remarkably little detail was known about the lives of rural women. Ardener's complaint that in anthropological studies women only appeared as 'lay figures in the men's drama' (Ardener 1977: 2) was as true of India as elsewhere.[9] In the 1970s and after, various studies of rural women have been published (see for example Jacobson 1970; Sharma 1980) however many questions concerning the ritual states of women were left unanswered.

(1) Pollution Beliefs

The question of the nature of female pollution in Hindu belief is one that has not been fully explored. Harper described pollution beliefs as helping 'to legitimate the social inferiority of women' (Harper 1964: 161). However this does not explain why the social inferiority of women should be legitimated by this form of symbolism rather than any other. In addition it neglects to emphasize that pollution beliefs imply that women do have certain powers allbe they anti-social and dangerous.

Examining pollution cross culturally, Ardener has suggested that what she calls 'sex pollution' ie. the power of one sex to pollute another, occurs when there is a 'critical lack of fit between the male model and a discrepant model which the actions (my underlining) of women force upon the attentions of men. By operating according to their own distinctive models women may seem in this sense to threaten or to distort or pollute the male model' (Ardener, S. 1977: 51, n19). She cites the case of the Lele described by Douglas. Women's flirtations and affairs could disrupt the hierarchy of Lele men which was built up on the ownership of, (ie. marriage to) women. Douglas herself seems to go further, putting forward the idea that 'where male dominance is accepted as the central principal of organisation and applied without inhibition and with full rights in physical coercion beliefs about sex pollution are unlikely to be highly developed' (Douglas 1966: 140).

Yalman's celebrated article on the purity of women in Ceylon (1963) examines the pollution beliefs surrounding female puberty. He demonstrates that the pollution and danger surrounding women at puberty seems to reflect the way in which women have the power to endanger the purity of caste and line. In doing so he identifies one way in which women might 'distort and pollute' the dominant model. However other forms of pollution, for example those associated with menstruation and birth are not so easily interpreted in this way. If the danger and pollution of female puberty are associated with control of female sexuality, it is ironic that the time of the month when women are least likely to indulge in sexual activity is the time, when even after puberty, their sexuality makes them polluting. Given that motherhood gives women high status it is also surprising that childbirth should be so strongly associated with pollution. This suggests that there may be other ways in which the actions of women challenge the dominant model of society and the

possibility of this should be considered in analysing pollution beliefs.

Recent works on the position of women in the kinship system suggest that while marrying exogamously, women maintain certain links with their natal kingroups. These links may be beneficial to the husband's agnatically organised kingroup but they also represent divided interests on the part of women. Women's loyalty to their natal kingroup may in fact disrupt the agnatically organised kinship grouping of their husbands (see chapter 2, and Sharma 1981; Jacobson 1970; Kolenda 1967 etc. for further discussion of this topic). This thesis suggests that much of the symbolism of pollution surrounding female physiological processes can be understood as an expression of the tensions created by a woman's dual filiation between kingroups as well as by the disruption a woman can cause if she is unchaste or unfaithful to her husband.

(2) Women's Participation in Rituals

As more detailed information about the lives of rural women has become available another issue concerning the relation of women to the sacred has presented itself. Luschinsky reports that 'The majority of religious activities in Senapur are conducted by women' (Luschinsky 1962: 300). Fruzetti (1975), Ray (1975) and Srinivas (1977) also stress the number of religious activities performed by women. My own data provides similar evidence. This seems to run contrary to the notion that the chief criteria for worship of the gods is purity and that the gods should be worshipped by the most ritually superior human beings available, that is by Brahmans or by male heads of families, (see Sharma 1970: 14). Das and Singh (1971) have suggested that the purity-impurity framework is not sufficient to explain the division of labour between men and women.

Wadley has suggested that much of women's participation in village ritual centres on their roles as wives, sisters and sometimes mothers. She sees this as an expression of the importance of these relationships in the lives of women. By performing rituals for the protection and welfare of husbands, brothers and sons, and in some cases by worshipping them, women are ensuring their own welfare because this depends on the men in question.

Fruzetti analyses the symbols of marriage rituals in a small town in Bengal. She argues that women have 'a social domain separable and understandable in its own terms...this domain is not defined by morphology alone (ie. separate sex role activities) but also through symbols which define and reinterpret a women's society in relation to society at large' (Fruzetti 1975: 335). It is the nature and characteristics of this domain that structure the participation of women in rituals rather than their relative impurity. Fruzetti suggests that women's relations with men are not necessarily contradictory or oppositional, but their domain is seen to be in a complementary relation to men's (ibid: 56). It is not that their interests compete with men's or that they have less power than men, rather, they have powers that complement men's. Thus many rites conducted by women involve objects used by women in everyday life and express the ideals of womanhood and the central role of women in the household. In many rituals women worship Laksmi and Sasthi both of whom are goddesses of wealth in the sense of fertility and in the sense of material goods. Both these benefits are associated with female powers.

Fruzetti connects the relation between male and female domains as they are expressed in ritual to the different kinds of ties that men and women have with the patrilineal kingroups. Women, marrying exogamously have a different kind of filiation to these groups than men. Women are represented

as having a nurturing function, providing substance in the form of wealth and children for the more enduring structural elements provided by men.

The work of Wadley and Fruzetti suggests that the division of religious labour between men and women is governed by principles that include more than those or purity and impurity and are related to women's position in the kinship system. Their work indicates one way in which the role of women in ritual, although on occasions giving them a degraded low status, on other occasions provides a source of self satisfaction and esteem. However their accounts of women's role in worshipping the gods do not include an analysis of the occasions when women are excluded from worshipping the gods. It seems paradoxical that a woman's power to provide for her family and to nurture these children should give her a special role in marriage rituals while when giving birth she is excluded from worship of the gods. By constructing a model in which women are seen as having physical and social sexuality, I am suggesting that the power of a woman to give birth is conceptually different from the kind of fertility associated with a woman in her worship of the gods. Physical and social sexuality are of different orders. Physical sexuality is concerned with the physical creation of a person. Social sexuality is concerned with the creation of a position for that person in 'the moral community'. The honoured aspect of female power and the one that gives women a role in worshipping the gods is the latter. Material collected by Fruzetti, Wadley and others showing women's complementary role in relation to men's largely concerns this aspect of woman's existence, ignoring the status accorded to women because of their physical powers.

(3) The Nature-Culture Paradigm

Wadley chooses the nature-culture paradigm to explain contradictory aspects of female status. She identifies two cultural constructs concerning 'facets of femaleness' (Wadley 1977: 114). These constructs are 'śakti (energy power), the energising principle of the universe'; and prakrti (nature) - the undifferentiated Matter of the Universe' (1977: 115). Unless female forces are controlled by 'purusa' which she translates variously as 'the Cosmic Person', 'the Spirit', 'structured code' and 'inactive or male aspect' (ibid. 114-5), there is danger. This danger arises because female forces are natural while male forces are cultural. Thus her argument can be summarised in the following equation:

women = śakti + prakrti
= power + danger
= Danger

Wadley sees the altering aspects of female status in the following terms:

Wife	Mother	Ghost
Culture via male control	Nature but in self control	Nature but out of control
Good	Good/Bad	Bad
Subordinated	Worshipped	Appeased

(ibid. 125)

It should be noted that Wadley is concerned with contrasting facets of female deities and other supernatural beings as well as women themselves.

The problem with using the categories nature-culture in this way is that although there appears to be some equivalence between our categories nature-culture and Indian

categories, it is difficult to know how far to take this equivalence.[10] The notion of the relation between nature and culture being one of opposition necessitating taming, domestication and control may be an ethnocentric notion.[11] Wadley does not seem to incorporate this possibility into her arguments and consequently neglects to explore what the relationship between nature and culture and hence between male and female principles may be.[12]

Although my own model relies on etically imposed categories it seems to present a better 'translation' than one in which the emic categories of the culture under analysis are assumed to be equivalent to the emic categories in our own culture. While certain aspects of female physiology are presented as threatening to the ordered social world in Hindu culture the threatening aspects of these processes are managed not simply by subduing or domesticating them but rather by keeping them separate from the domain which they threaten. This is done by representing women as having a set of conceptually distinct but parallel powers - ie. social and physical sexuality. Control is affected by men controlling the access of women to powers that might be called cultural as opposed to natural ie. their access to social sexuality.[13] Women whether as wives or mothers then maintain self control over their own powers. A mother is not necessarily 'nature but in self control' but rather a figure who has both social and physical sexuality and a wife is in a similar position. A woman is bad when her physical sexuality rather than her social sexuality is expressed.

This implies that rather than looking at female powers as powers that need control, we should see women themselves as mediators. MacCormack in her critique of the uses of nature and culture in anthropological analysis makes a similar point. 'If we took an extreme position of defining women but not men as socializers, cultivators, cooks - as mediators between nature and culture - and if we viewed them in the

structure of kinship as mediators between exogamous social groups, then we must look more closely at the attributes structuralists confer upon mediators. Because they can merge and reconcile opposites, mediators are deity, or messiah and at the same time clown and trickster' (MacCormack 1980: 9). Thus the situation that Wadley describes could be explained in terms of mediation rather than control and the categories social and physical sexuality seem more useful in this context than nature and culture with all their associated pitfalls.

Wadley's analysis starts from the point of looking at facets of femaleness in the supernatural world and extrapolating from the oppositions and relations that occur in myth concerning the deities. However as she admits she does not deal 'with the relation between female biology (pollution/purity) and perceptions of the female in Hinduism' (ibid. 137, n31). The attempt to incorporate biology into the paradigm she has used, is what has led me to adopt an alternative framework.

The notion of the existence of different kinds of powers with one power being given higher status than another rather than controlling another seems implicit in Dumont's classic writing on the caste system. He rejects the notion of hierarchy in the caste system as being that of 'a ladder of command' or 'a question of systematically graduated authority' writing that it involves 'gradation but is neither power or authority' (Dumont 1980: 65). He goes on to suggest that 'in India there has never been spiritual power (his italics), ie. a supreme spiritual authority, which was at the same time a temporal power' (Dumont 1980: 72). He also writes: 'status and power and consequently spiritual authority and temporal authority are absolutely distinguished' (Dumont ibid.). The supremacy of the Brahman caste in the varn system stems from it's association with the principle by which all other powers are ranked according to their 'degrees of dignity'.

Thus it is the status of the religious force which gives the Brahman supremacy in the hierarchy rather than his power over others. Nevertheless the Brahman has authority but not the politico-temporal power of the Kshatriya. He has spiritual authority.

Wadley has contended that relations in Hinduism are ranked according to the degree of power that one individual has over another, and Dumont has criticised her for this view. He says that what she calls power is 'potency' - or 'a feeling of dependency' (Dumont 1980: xxi-ii). All authority engenders feelings of dependency but since there are different kinds of authority - ie. spiritual and temporal authority - it is a mistake to see dependency as a unifying principle. It is the product of a number of different principles which order hierarchy but not the ordering principle itself. The ordering principle is that which gives these 'feelings of dependency' different status according to the authority involved.

In suggesting that women have two kinds of power - ie. their social and physical sexuality, I am arguing not only that one aspect of female power has higher status than another but also that the relationship between the two kinds of power need not necessarily be one of control or domination. Social sexuality has status that is higher than physical sexuality but it does not control physical sexuality. This parallels the way in which in Dumont's analysis of the caste system the Brahman has higher status than the Kshatriya but yet does not control the Kshatriya. The ways in which physical and social sexuality differ and why social sexuality is accorded such high status will be explored in the main body of the thesis. However it should be said that they are related to the way in which status and authority are given in the 'moral community' as a whole.

SOCIAL SEXUALITY AND THE CREATION OF THE MORAL COMMUNITY

Having rejected an analysis of the different aspects of female power in terms of the nature-culture paradigm, it is necessary to define more closely what is meant by the terms physical and social sexuality and 'moral community'. The context in which Bloch and Guggenheim discuss the idea of the 'moral community' is initially at least a European one (1981: 380). They point out that Gudeman noted, when discussing the institution of baptism, 'through baptism the child gains membership in the moral community....' (Bloch and Guggenheim 1981: 380). This community is the local community as whole where ties are not simply created by birth and the relations created through the biological roles of genitor, genitrix and child, but are relations created by politico-religious authority, in this case the Christian church. The symbolism of baptism reflects the difference between the quality of the ties that bind a child to his physical parents and those that bind him to his god-parents and to the wider community. There is a contrast between the duties, rights and obligations that a child has in the wider community which has as its organising ideology Christian morality, and the private household into which the child has been born. Bloch and Guggenheim suggest that baptism represents the incorporation of the individual into a wider public community not based on the biological relationships from which the household seems to be constructed. They suggest that this process may occur in cultures other than those influenced by Christianity. This is because this process is essential in the creation of the ideology of a community.

Bloch and Guggenheim take as central to the process the following factors:

(1) the notion of denying the value of biological birth;
(2) associating the processes of natural reproduction exclusively with women;

(3) the acting out of a mock birth;
(4) the giving of substitute spiritual parents to accompany this other birth who must therefore not be the biological parents or at least the mother.

(Bloch and Guggenheim 1981: 381)

The life-cycle rites of the Central Indian village in which this study was undertaken also suggest that the creation of the ideology of the community involve ties other than those created by physical birth. The evidence can be summarised as follows:

(1) The transformations that occur in a woman at marriage and menarche suggest not only that the processes of social and physical maturation are distinct but also that they are independent of one another.
(2) At marriage women seem to acquire a power that is associated with having children but which is distinct from physical fertility.
(3) The processes of natural reproduction are associated exclusively with women and are polluting.
(4) At marriage both men and women undergo a meta-birth that gives them full membership of the community.
(5) Both men and women have a role as parents in this meta-birth.

Where the evidence departs from that used by Bloch and Guggenheim is that the parents at the meta-birth may be the child's natural parents. Bloch and Guggenheim argue that they should not be the child's natural parents because otherwise the opposition between natural and spiritual parents is not demonstrated. However rather than suggesting that meta-birth does not play a part in the creation of the 'moral community' in the Hindu village I observed, I would argue that in this instance the 'moral community' exists but is differently constructed. Consequently the opposition between natural

and spiritual existence does not assume the same importance.

Although the parents at this meta-birth may be the natural parents there are certain restrictions on which women may take this role (see chapter 5). The 'mother' must be married with a living husband and not in a polluting state through menstruation etc., even if this means she must be other than the biological mother. The opposition in types of parenthood here is between motherhood associated with marriage, purity and a living husband and motherhood not associated with marriage, purity or a living husband. In the European context it is an individual's membership of the church which is seen as creating the relations with the wider community and which contrasts with the narrower ties created by biological relations. In the Hindu village marriage defines an individual's links with wider society giving him or her an adult role in the kin grouping. In addition it associates women with pure auspicious powers valued by the community rather than the polluting powers they acquire as part of their physiological development. Marriage then underpins the ties that organise the wider community. The institutions that shape these ties are organised patrilineally and principles of purity and pollution express differences of status within the community. Thus women have a part to play in the creation of full membership of this wider community but can only do it if associated with a patrilineal grouping through a man. It is only then that they are auspicious. The symbolism and imagery surrounding marriage and other lifecycle rites seem to suggest that the social ties that provide an individual with rights and duties beyond his immediate household have as their basis the rights and duties involved in membership of patrilineal groupings. Marriage is a pivotal event because not only does it allow a man and a women to become full members of a patrilineal grouping but it also provides the necessary conditions for the continuance of the grouping and for links to be established with other groups. It also celebrates purity as

opposed to pollution.

The symbolism of marriage which incorporates the process of a meta-birth suggests that although the patrilineal groups have as an organising principle a biological relationship, that of father and children, the tie is something more than in a strictly physical one. Ultimately the physical tie is conceptually separable from the more significant social tie. The social aspect of the tie is given more significance than the physical tie. This can be seen not only in the rituals of meta-birth, at marriage but in the existence of institutions like adoption. Adoption enables a man to recruit a new member to the patrilineage without the necessity of there being any physical link between them and implies that men can create social ties which parallel physical relations and can substitute for them. Women's social sexuality concerns the part they play in the creation and maintenance of these social ties within the patrilineal groupings. It is given a status which their part in the creation of biological ties is not. This is because the ties that bind together the 'moral community' are not perceived as being based on these biological ties.

It may seem to be stretching a point to refer to women's powers in respect of these social ties as social sexuality. The justification for this is that physical fertility, birth, and a woman's ability to produce children seem to be the metaphors used in symbolism for their role in this creative process. This is why motherhood can seem to give a woman high status while birth is dirty and degrading. The contradictions and inconsistencies in the status of women as mothers become comprehensible when motherhood is divided into its social and physical components with social motherhood having the higher status. Just as kinship relations use the form of biological ties to symbolise relations which are other than biological[14] so women's social sexuality assumes many of the characteristics associated with physical sexuality but is not identical

with it; - hence the confusion to the observer.

Within the context of Christian European cultures the 'natural' and 'cultural' aspects of man's existence can be symbolized by representing the household and parents as 'natural' and the church and god parents as 'cultural'. The necessity for having godparents who are different from parents is part of the representation of parents as 'natural'. In Hindu village religion there is no group that can be opposed to the 'natural' grouping of the household in the way that the Church is in Christian culture. Moreover it is the 'natural' group of household which seems to form the basis of 'the moral community'. However the restrictions on which women may be 'mothers' at the meta-birth suggest that different principles are involved in an individual's membership of his kingrouping, and that one social tie is given higher status than the other. The concept of social and physical sexuality seems to express this situation better than describing women as having cultural and/or natural powers.

FEMALE PURITY AND POLLUTION REVISITED

Women's altering ritual states vary according to the relation which they are in with regards the 'moral community' at any given time. However as Berger and Luckman (1967) have pointed out since these categories and classifications are constructed by the human mind, events and processes occur which threaten to confound these categories and classifications. Since these confusing situations occur not infrequently, systems of classification seem to have mechanisms built into themselves which serve to place these liminal or threatening events.

In Hinduism, Das argues, states of extreme purity are one way of dealing with such confusion while states of impurity are another (Das 1976: 245). Purity occurs when the categories of the 'moral community' are transcended but not threatened. This is possible because over and beyond the construction of

reality which governs everyday life there is a perceived cosmic reality. 'An individual enters an extreme state of purity when he is making contact with those sacred categories which do not disturb his cosmization of reality' (Das, 1977: 129). In contrast he enters a state of impurity when events occur which threaten to disrupt the categories of the 'moral community' without placing them in such a meaningful framework. Thus death incorporates the symbolism of purity and impurity. The transition of a dead person from life to a place in the world of the ancestors is part of the wider cosmic structure and this aspect of liminality is associated with purity. The physical process of dying is associated with impurity since the physical act does not have a meaning in the same way and represents a threat of disruption to socially ordered categories. This is why, Das argues, that mourners are involved with dealing with impurity and yet at the same time because they are associated with the transition of a person from life in the living world to a place in the world of the dead are also associated with symbols of purity (Das 1976: 254-256; see chapter 7 for a further discussion of this point).

Purity thus represents transcendence over the categories which order the moral community, placing liminalities in the context of existence which is associated with principles that govern the 'moral community' but are removed from everyday human relations. Pollution involves liminalities which are alien to the principles on which the 'moral community' is structured. Women are polluting when their role in physiological reproduction places them outside the 'moral community' since it does not form the basis of that community. The symbolism which expresses the liminality associated with this physical state acts as the 'sensory pole' (Turner1967: 28) of symbolism which expresses the other ways that women may challenge the basis of the 'moral community'.[15] Hence the relation between pollution and 'the known dangers' of women to society outlined above.

Women are pure when their social sexuality gives them a role in transcending the categories of the 'moral community' in a way that does not represent a threat to the 'moral community' but is in accordance with its organising principles. Thus at weddings bride and groom although in liminal states are pure because the transformation they are undergoing is controlled and legitimated by social agents and women who have an important part of play in this transformation are pure because here their powers identify them with the principles of the 'moral community'.

It can be objected that other groups than women are associated with impurity or purity more or less permanently - for example - untouchable castes and high castes; and thus the framework I have proposed would put both these groups permanently outside the 'moral community' in some way. This is not necessarily so. It seems likely that female purity and pollution and that of caste groupings are of different qualities Caste pollution or purity is permanent and does not depend on individual action. Female pollution varies according to the state of an individual woman. Women may be divided from one another by their different degrees of purity and impurity in a way that members of one caste are not divided from one another by the purity or pollution of that particular caste. Caste pollution and purity regulates the contacts of members of different castes with one another and thus regulates their participation with members of the wider community but because it is associated with groups ie. castes, it does not isolate individuals from membership of a community. It may give status or deny status in the community of mixed castes but it does not isolate them from it. Women's state of purity and pollution varies, so that while menstruating or giving birth they are cut off from contact with others, even other women, and are segregated from each other and the 'moral community' but at other times they resume a normal place within it.

In addition states of female impurity are associated with danger and this does not seem to apply to the impurity associated with certain castes. This may be because castes within the ordered 'moral community' are represented as safe while the isolating states associated with women in polluting states place them in a dangerous situation. They are in danger because they are not part of the 'moral community'. Low caste status does not place someone outside the community in the same way.[16]

Recently feminists have suggested that it is not enough simply to describe states where women are insubordinate but it is also necessary to describe the ideological mechanisms which may encourage women to accept this insubordination.[17] In this context one mechanism may be the association of women with an honoured role in the creation of the 'moral community' which balances the powers she has which place her outside this community. It is in her interests to be associated with these honoured social powers rather than the asocial polluting powers which endanger her. This is perhaps why women do not use their pollution as a source of power against men. The symbolism associated with it and their social sexuality suggests that it is more rewarding for a woman to associate herself with the powers of 'moral community'.

Furthermore the symbolism concerning the powers that women have in relation to the 'moral community' suggests that although these powers are undeniably female women only acquire access to them through men. In the background chapter and throughout the thesis I shall present evidence to suggest that just as factors in the structure of kinship and economic system serve to divide women from one another by making them see their interests in terms of individual men and households rather than in terms of women (see Sharma 1978), so the symbolism of purity and pollution separates women from one another making specifically female powers isolate one

woman from another and identify the powers that women do have with their association with a man.

FIELDWORK

Fieldwork was conducted during a fifteen month period in India from August 1978 to November 1979. During most of this time I was resident in a village in the Malwa region of Madhya Pradesh which I will refer to by the pseudonym of Ambakhedi. A fuller description of the village is given in chapter 2.

Reasons for choosing a village in the Malwa region included:

(a) The largely Hindu nature of this area and my research interest was in the position of Hindu women rather than Muslim or tribal women;

(b) My interest in the position of women in the Northern and Central Indian kinship systems where gotrā (clan) exogamy is practised rather than in their position in southern India where cross cousin marriage is practised more frequently.

(c) I wanted to find out more about the nature of pollution beliefs about women in central India - existing studies had documented these more fully in the south (see Harper 1964 and Eichinger 1974).

(d) Professor Mayer's work on and knowledge of the Malwa region provided a useful background of the general features of the region. In conducting a study of women I felt it would be useful to work in a region where I could draw upon background knowledge to supplement my own more narrowly focused interest on the issues of the social construction of femaleness. This was particularly so since other postgraduate students were working on other topics in the Malwa region at the same time as my work started.

Given that women's loyalties are divided between different villages because of the exogamous marriage patterns between villages a question is raised as to how far it is justifiable to choose the village as a unit of fieldwork (cf. Sharma 1980: 19). Reasons for my choice were pragmatic: the village is an obvious site for participant observation', 'a method which by its nature must focus on the micro community' (Sharma 1980: 18). In addition as I will show in chapter 2 the women whom I talked to and observed were not just from one village but from many within the region. The ritual practices which I was interested in seemed to be common throughout the region according to the women I discussed them with. Thus a convenient physical location provided access to data that could be said to be fairly representative of the region as a whole. I did not choose to study a village because I believe it to be the basic unit of Indian society (cf. Dumont 1970 : 154) but rather because it was a convenient location for field research.

My reasons for choosing Ambakhedi itself were diverse and included practical considerations such as the availability of accommodation, the ease of obtaining introduction to the village and so forth. In addition I wanted a village with a mixed caste population so that I could see if beliefs about the pollution of women varied according to caste. Given that castes are ranked according to degrees of purity or impurity in understanding more fully the status of women it seemed better to focus on how it was related to ideas about caste pollution. Since other studies had been done on urban women (eg. Kapur 1970; Goldstein 1975) I wanted to study a village where urban influence was not too marked. I also wanted to avoid a village with strong tribal influences since I felt this would obscure my study of issues involved in studying Hindu women. These considerations meant that I should live in a fairly large village probably with a population of between 900 and 1500. Ambakhedi with a population of 1400

fulfilled most of the above criteria.

I lived in the centre of the village in four rooms which formed part of a large concrete building used as a storehouse and sleeping place for a large Rajput family who also had a mud house next door. This meant that although my domestic arrangements were separate from the family, I lived close enough to them to meet them continually and informally while they worked on verandahs etc., while retaining enough autonomy to be able to work and write up notes etc., and to mix with lower castes.

During most of my stay in the village I worked with a young Indian woman from the city, Neeta Tyagi whom I employed as my research assistant and who acted as companion and interpreter where my own knowledge of Hindu proved inadequate. She lived with me in the village returning to her family at weekends. With her help I was able to observe most of the rituals and events described in the following chapters and obtain detailed descriptions of those events which I could not observe. Information on other topics was recorded in daily journals or collected in discussions with informants which we deliberately focused on these topics.

We were able to work with both men and women and so material on topics was provided by both sexes. However our range of female informants was far wider than our range of male informants. There were two reasons for this. Firstly many of the topics that concerned women's rituals or knowledge of aspects of domestic life were of little interest to men who seemed to know very little about them. Secondly the presence of a young Indian woman assistant and my interest in the world of women combined to give me a status in the eyes of the village that was undeniably female and in consequence limited my access to male informants. Although I was not limited in my movements or contact with the opposite sex in the way in which village women are (see chapter 2), villagers were conscious of my sex, age and unmarried status and this meant that establishing

relaxed relations with a wide group of men or attending all male gatherings caused embarassment and difficulties for the informants, for my assistant and me, as well as criticism and censure by other men and women. Had I been older and far less obviously identified with the world of women it might have been easier to obtain the honourary male status so often attained by anthropologists but this in turn might have restricted my access to women.

My housing meant that I did become very well acquainted with my landlord, members of his family and other male neighbours in the area where I lived. These men tended to look on me as a sister and since this was a relationship which is relatively free it allowed me to develop relations with them where I could discuss certain topics in depth. They therefore provided a male component to my otherwise female biassed evidence. Among the low castes I also developed fairly close relationships with two male informants both of whom defined themselves in a special relation to me by virtue of their interest in religion. One was an elderly man who had at one time practised an ascetic way of life but had returned to the village because of ill-health but set himself up as a guru for other members of his caste and regarded my assistant and me as his chelā. I also had contact with one man who was regularly involved in spirit possession and again defined his relation to me in the context of religion. Otherwise although I would try to interview some men on the issues concerned, in general most of my key informants, ie. the informants with whom I could have the most detailed discussions, were women.

I mention this aspect of my fieldwork to set my material in its context and to point out that if my material suffers from a lack of one kind of evidence, it contrasts with the lack pointed out by Ardener when he remarks that male anthropologists returning from the field had talked to men about women rather than to women themselves (Ardener, E. 1977: 1-2). Given

the constraints I was under there was little I could to to remedy the situation but my failures perhaps leave open the question of more detailed knowledge of men's views on the subjects discussed and indeed on the social construction of masculinity for another investigator at a later date.

I have often been asked how far my own unmarried status excluded me from discussions about sex and birth etc. It is difficult to assess this accurately but I obtained my introduction to the village through the workers of a Gandhian institution, many of whom were unmarried women. Some of their social workers and nurses visited the village from time to time to discuss topics such as family planning, ante-natal and post-natal care etc. From my second day in the village it was assumed that my assistant and I would have similar kinds of knowledge about sex and birth even although we had not experienced these matters at first hand. Therefore although my age and status may have excluded me from discussion of very intimate matters women did not assume that I was ignorant about general processes or that it was not suitable to talk about these matters in front of me.

ALTERING RITUAL STATES: THE EVIDENCE IN THE CHAPTERS

The life-cycle has been chosen as the framework for presenting and analysing material about the ritual states of women for several reasons. Firstly it shows how the individual's ritual state does vary. Secondly it facilitates the examination of the interplay between social and physical development. Thirdly it sets the analysis in the context of observed events and behaviour rather than theoretical argument which might have been the case if theoretical themes had been used to organise the material.

Chapter 2 sets the stage forthe presentation of the life-cycle material providing an outline of the social structure and history of the village. It is designed to

highlight elements of the social structure which are reflected in the symbolism which depicts women as threatening as well as auspicious, and also to show that women have certain powers although access to these powers is usually controlled by men.

Chapter 3 deals with the marked and unmarked ritual states of an unmarried girl and factors which terminate this particular stage of a women's life. The relation of menarche and marriage to the unmarried girl's ritual state reveal how this status is constructed and the relative status of physical and social sexuality. Chapter 4 looks at the pollution associated with menstruation other than that of menarche. This is examined in detail to illustrate the kind of powers with which mature female physical sexuality is associated. Chapter 5 describes the transformation a girl undergoes at marriage and the role that other married women play in this transformation. Thus it is aboutthe way status is changed and about the powers associated with this changed status. The chapter on birth describes the process of becoming a mother for the first time and the way birth is conceptualised subsequently. The chapter on death describes two different kinds of status transformation: the transformation of a woman from being alive to dead and the change from being a wife to a widow. The role of women as mourners is also discussed here. The last substantive chapter, chapter 8, steps outside a strict life-cycle perspective in that it examines women's participation in the calendrical cycle of rituals. This evidence has been included because it provides added support for the themes developed about the relation women to deities and 'the moral community' in the context of life crises. The brief concluding chapter summarizes and presents an overview of the evidence presented in the different chapters.

The result of attempting to describe different kinds of relation to the sacred is that the chapters themselves vary in construction. In some chapters such as those on birth (6),

marriage (5) and death (7) the focus is on a particular life-cycle ritual and analysis proceeds from this point. Where possible I have included a detailed description of the ritual and then discussed it so that the evidence is open to the reader, for him or herself to judge. In other chapters such as that on unmarried girls (3) the substance of the chapter is the description of the girl's ritual state since there is no one life-cycle ritual which is especially revealing in this respect. The chapters on menstruation and calendrical rituals focus on regularly occurring taboos and rituals because these are the situations which reveal most. The mixture of the kind of evidence presented adds support to the validity of the model I have constructed because it seems to apply to more than one kind of situation and thus may represent an important underlying structure. It is hoped that presented in this way the material represents a contribution to the study of village Hinduism and to studdies concerning the social construction of gender.

NOTES

1. Sharma distinguishes three main aspects of gender role found in any given society:

   (1) 'the extent to which either sex is denied access to positions of control' (Sharma 1978: 260).

   (2) 'some kind of division of labour between the sexes' (Sharma 1978: 261).

   (3) 'structural arrangements that segregate men from women in some degree' (ibid.)

   While I accept that in part the kind of power that women have ie. their role in the division of labour that makes them dependent on men, I would also add that men control access to the type of power that can give women an honoured status, while not necessarily having this power for themselves.

2. I have not attempted to develop a complex theoretical framework to understand the relation between the values expressed in the symbolism concerning women and their position in the social structure and doubt whether it could ever reasonably be said that one determines the other. Instead I prefer to see the relation between values expressed in symbolism and other aspects of the position of women as what Ardener has called 'mutually affecting spheres of reality' (Ardener, S. 1981: 15).

3. I am not arguing here that beliefs about women are 'muted' because they are a low status group and to articulate beliefs about them fully would be to acknowledge power and status that is in fact denied (cf. Ardener, S. 1977). This may be the case but the evidence is not conclusive. Rather in the tradition of Turner and others (see for example Turner 1969) I would suggest that where for whatever reasons there is not an emic model or models which make the situation comprehensible to observers the symbols of ritual may provide evidence on which the analyst's model can be constructed.

4. This is not to say that in the construction of analytical model the inconsistencies and contradictions will disappear. The analytical model will however indicate how such inconsistencies and contradictions can be tolerated or minimised. For example Hershman analysing certain contradictions in the symbolism surrounding women in the Punjab writes: 'In Punjabi ritual the symbols of the goddess who is both virgin and mother and the cow that is both animal and human do not so much synthesize contradictory values through their anomalous character but instead maintain the separateness of those values by highlighting their proximity to one another' (Hershman 1977: 291). The model which I have put forward suggests that contradictions in female status are minimized by the separateness but proximity of female powers which give women themselves different kinds of status, at different times.

5. The analogy between language and culture is of course not original and stems from the work of Levi-Strauss (see for example Levi-Strauss 1972). The distinction made between 'langue', 'a total system of word conventions and usages' and 'parole', the selection an individual speaker makes from this total system (see Leach 1974: 45) perhaps sheds additional light on why the individual actor is not aware of the underlying structure of language.

6. See Gellner (1970) for further discussion of issues concerning the relation of the analyst's model to the observed reality.

7. This version of the method of the interpretation of symbolism is an oversimplification of the principles of symbolic analysis that has been developed by social anthropologists and others. The literature on the subject is extensive. See for example: Saussure 1916; Levi-Strauss 1963, 1962a, 1972b; Crick 1976 and Douglas 1978.

8. For a lucid introductory discussion to the way in which systems of symbolic classification structure patterns of behaviour, see Pocock 1975.

9. My comments on previous studies of Indian women are largely confined to studies of rural women and more particularly the symbolic values associated with them. For a more comprehensive view of the subject see Caplan 1979. For comments on male bias in Social Anthropology see Sharma 1981.

10. Various authors have point out how although the process of defining certain aspects of existence as natural as opposed to cultural seems to be nearly universal this process is itself cultural and as such the categories are not a-priori given but may vary between and within cultures. See for example: Ardener, S. 1977; Barnes, 1973; Ortener 1974 and MacCormack 1980.

11. See for example the comments by Maurice and Jean Bloch about how the notion of this opposition and the relationship of nature to culture developed in European thought and how the developments are related to other historical developments (1980).

12. MacCormack suggests that seeing the relationship between nature and culture in terms of opposition has obscured the role of women as mediators between these categories (MacCormack 1980: 9).

13. Because of the problems associated with the use of the term culture, I am reluctant to identify social sexuality as a cultural power. For example it seems likely that lactation which is not polluting should be included under the heading of powers associated with a women's social sexuality while we might class this as a natural power.

14. For examples of studies which elucidate how varying 'cultural constructions' of kinship use the biological relations, see Schneider on American kinship (1968a) and Inden and Nicholas on Bengali kinship (1977).

15. This argument is heavily influenced by Turner. In his study of Ndembu symbolism he argues that 'Ndembu symbols possess two clearly distinguishable poles of meaning. At one pole is found a cluster of significata that refer to components of moral and social orders of Ndembu society, to principles of social organisation and to kinds of corporate grouping and to the norms and values inherent in structural relationships. At the other end of the pole the significata are usually natural and physiological phenomena and processes. Let us call the first the 'ideological pole' and the second the 'sensory pole' (Turner 1967: 28). To the extent that women can be said to have physical and social sexuality in the Indian context it might be said that their sexuality is used as the 'sensory pole' of two different kinds of 'ideological pole'. Thus physical sexuality itself is associated with disruption and removed from social sexuality which is associated with the positive contribution of women to society.

16. On this argument outcasting would presumably put someone in danger unless they could find a group with which to identify. I have no data on this point but it might be worthwhile pursuing.

17. Compare the question raised by Patricia Jeffery in her study of Muslim women in a village near Delhi: 'Here I am concerned with how the pirzada women are implicated in perpetuating degrading self-images and why they accede to the marginality granted to them and with specifying the conditions under which they begin to question their allotted place' (Jeffery, P. 1981: 9).

CHAPTER 2

THE VILLAGE: A PROFILE

This chapter has been divided into two sections, Part 1 concerns the village as a place ie. its historical, geographical and physical setting. Although rarely referred to in later chapters it provides some indication of the particular Indian traditions that have influenced the village and thus the relevance of this study for those studying other areas of India. Part 2 concerns the social organisation of the village ie. the structure of 'the moral community'. The information given is necessarily cursory and for more detailed consideration of Central Indian villages the reader is referred to Mayer 1973 and Jacobson 1970. Figures and tables referred to will be found at the end of the chapter after the footnotes.

The relation between women's place in the social structure of the village and their ritual states is not examined in detail at this stage. Instead the chapter acts as a reference point for facets of the social structure referred to later. Certain features should be noted since they are central to subsequent arguments. Firstly the social structure is biased toward male control since men hold most of the key political and economic positions and it is patrilineal descent which usually gives access to property and hereditary office. However although the principle of male dominance is at the fore there are some opportunities for women to gain power (usually through men) and some opportunities for women to challenge the system. This highlights the issue of why women do not challenge the dominant ideology more often and the subsequent analyses of ritual provide some answers to this question. Secondly the discussion of kingroups indicates that women are instrumental in blurring the boundaries of patrilineally organised groups and that their presence may at times be disruptive. Thirdly women as a group do not seem

to have an identity as an action set unlike other groups such as caste, village, or household.[1] Their loyalties are divided between these groups. Fourthly concepts of purity and pollution are not just idioms for expressing the ritual state of women, they are also used to express ideas about the relative status of castes. Women's ritual states have to be considered in the context of the specific connotations that purity and pollution have for the community as a whole.

PART 1: THE VILLAGE AND ITS REGION

PHYSICAL LOCATION AND GENERAL SETTING

Ambakhedi (a pseudonym) is a village with a population of 1400 and is approximately 9 miles from Indore which is the largest city in the state of Madhya Pradesh (see Figs. 1, 2, and 3). To reach Ambakhedi one leaves Indore and takes the road that runs south west towards Khandwa. The road runs through acres of flat cultivated fields. On the horizon on either side three or four small, gently curving hills can be seen. Ambakhedi itself is overlooked by one of these. They mark the beginning of the Vindhyan range of hills and the edge of the Malwa plateau on which Ambakhedi is situated. Six miles out of Indore the traveller to Ambakhedi turns off the main road into a small turning, leaving the main road to continue on through country which rapidly becomes more forested and hilly, the terrain characteristic of the Nimar region which lies on the edge of the plateau.

The Malwa plateau is 200 miles north to south and 150 miles east to west. It is between 1500 and 2000 feet above sea level. This means that it has a relatively mild climate. About 20-30 inches of rain fall in the wet season (July-September). In the cold season (November-February) day time temperatures are between 60 and 80 degreesF., and in the hot season (April-June) the day temperatures are between 85

and 100 degrees F. The elevation means that breezes often temper the hottest days and the nights are famed for being cool.

The turning to Ambakhedi is marked by a small roadside village. Like many other villages of its kind it comprises a petrol pump, some teashops, a bus stop and miscellaneous other small shops. The inhabitants of Ambakhedi can often be met in this village. A tailor who lives in Ambakhedi has a shop here, and another Ambakhedi man has a cycle repair shop. There is also a private school which some boys from Ambakhedi attend, and Ambakhedi's patavāri (the village accountant) has his office here. The village also houses the doctor nearest to Ambakhedi and is the site of the nearest bus stop. Ambakhedi men often use the village as a meeting place particularly if they have business in Indore and are travelling there by bus or cycle. Women come less often for as I will show below they travel less to Indore and are not encouraged to meet in public places, such as teashops, in the way that men are.

Unlike the busy Khandwa road, the side road to Ambakhedi is not a through way and no one goes down it unless they have business in Ambakhedi. About a mile and a half along it one comes to the first evidence of the village, a scattered group of houses (see Area D on Fig. 4). They are well-spaced out, seemingly more or less at random and there is no feeling of streets or paths between them. This is because this neighbourhood acts as a kind of overspill area for the main part of the village which lies further down the road and only 32 of the village's 214 households are here.

It is here where the new school building has been built and here where there is a small deserted brick house built by the district housing development authority who plan to build more on this site if enough interest from the village is forthcoming. Here too, is a place where the migrant Bhils camp when they come to work in the harvest as labourers each year. There is also a small temple of the god Hanuman, which is used in some village rituals.

After passing these houses the road dips down past the high grass bank which bounds the irrigation tank and eventually swings round past a large pīpal tree, to the main part of the village. The contrast of this area with the outlying houses is marked, for here houses are spaced close together on either side of definite streets and alleys. Many of the houses are four or five feet above street level suggesting they have been built up over years of accumulated mud foundations.

The patel's (headman's) house is one of the first houses one comes to and then the road bends once more, sloping upwards, the tarmac finishing in front of the village's three largest temples. It is here where wedding parties of the high and middle castes are greeted and public meetings involving the most of the village are held.

It can be seen from Fig. 4 that the most densely populated area is here. Upper and middle castes live in the area marked as A, low caste Balai live in the area marked as C and the low caste Jatavlive in the area marked as B. (Details of caste organisation are given below). Area D contains a mixture of castes because of its nature as an overspill area. In addition households are situated in different isolated spots anything up to a mile or mile and a half from the centre of the village. In recent years with the coming of electricity (approximately 1969) and more extensive use of diesel pumps, some families have chosen to live by wells near their land so that they can guard their equipment from damage by enemies and theft. Housing conditions are less cramped there. Women living in these isolated households complain that they miss the company of people in the village and the friendship of neighbours. Men do not have the same problem for they often have to come to the village for trading and other business. Unlike women they can move about freely after dark when the day's work is over. Women however are confined to these more isolated spots by the routine nature

of their work and restrictions on their movement caused by considerations of modesty and fear of rape. They envy the companionship found in the more densely populated village.[2]

The central area of the village is an attractive site. It is on a hillock and surrounded by fields and a vista of trees. Since much of the neighbouring land was once part of a raja's hunting estate there are more trees than elsewhere in the region and the hill overlooking the village has ruins of the raja's hunting palace on its peak. Older inhabitants remember seeing elephants carrying goods for hunting parties up to the top.

HOUSING

The houses in the village are mostly made of mud. The roofs are either corrugated iron or red tiling. There are no chimneys and the smoke comes up through the roofs. Most of the houses are one storey although there are some two storey houses and some of the older ones even have stone flagged lower floors. As in other nearby villages there is now a trend for those with money and large families to build large two storey concrete houses with store rooms for grain and several separate rooms for living in. (It was one of these houses in which I lived). There are now three such houses in the village all owned by the largest caste, the Rajputs.

I have attached plans (see Fig. 5) of three different sorts of mud houses. (The concrete houses are more elaborate versions of the same idea). All houses have a verandah where visitors are received, wedding ceremonies performed, and women do much household work. Inside the house there will be one or more rooms for working and sleeping. The mud stove which plays an integral part in a woman's life is always in the innermost part of the house and usually behind a partition made by the large mud grain bins which reach almost up to the ceiling. The area with the stove in it is often

referred to as the cauk.

Two features about the houses seem worth noting: 1) There is little privacy. Men, women and children, all sleep, work and eat in a small space. Husband and wife have little opportunity to be alone. Marital relations requiring privacy take place in dark corners at night or in small adjoining storage rooms occasionally allotted to married couples as sleeping quarters. I mention this as lack of intimacy characterises the relation between a new wife and her husband. 2) There is no specific women's quarter in the house (cf. Sharma 1978: 267). Although there are veiling practices, which will be described below, this is not a situation where as in some Muslim houses in India, men and women are strictly segregated. Women (except during their menstrual periods) are free to move in all areas of the house; and if engaged in routine housework like cleaning wheat, shelling corn or grinding will often sit on the verandah so they can call to passing female friends. If their husband has male guests they will retire to the inside of the house but there are no specially designated male or female areas. Each situation defines who should use what space as it occurs.[3] Respect rules implicit in kinship relations determine whether men, men and women or just women are present. This means male and female worlds are far more closely integrated than might be the case where space is organised differently.[4]

WELLS AND SITTING PLACES

Before leaving the description of the physical setting of the village, it is worth mentioning the places where men and women gather to meet and discuss various matters with one another. Male gatherings are more obvious than women's because if a woman stays too long, seemingly engaged in idle chatter, she may earn herself a bad reputation. An outsider coming into the village is more aware of groups of men sitting together. Generally there are about ten

places where men congregate. These include the area opposite the patel's house, the area in front of the three temples in the neighbourhood I have marked as A (Fig. 4), the areas in front of the temples in B and C, and in front of the six small shops that various householders run.

Women are not encouraged to visit somewhere just to meet, but most normally manage to exchange some gossip while drawing water from the wells and/or when going to the big new well which has a tank where they can wash clothes. If no men are present they too may stop to exchange gossip near the patel's house on the way to take flour to be ground at the electric flour mill. The fact women work and move about village and often sit on their verandahs means that they are not totally cut off from one another, but their life centres more on their household than a man's does and perhaps contributes to their lack of identity as a group.

MALWA: HISTORY

Before going on to describe what little is known about the village's history it is necessary to set this in the context of the history of the Malwa region as a whole. This also helps show the links the region has with the rest of India and sets the material presented on ritual states in its wider Indian context. The symbolism discussed is the product not only of the social relations in the village itself but of wider cultural traditions.

Malwa is said to owe its name to a tribe called the Malawa who seem to have lived in the Paryatra mountains of the Western Vindhyas (Russel 1908: 101) and later settled in the area. It has a distinct cultural identity. The local dialect is known as Malwi and many castes, for example the Balai describe themselves as Malwi and dissociate themselves from Balai in villages to the south who they say are Nimar Balai.[5] Moreover most villagers are aware that they are on the very edge of Malwa. They will often say that

rituals are performed in the central villages of the region but notin Ambakhedi. Conversely they are aware that certain of their practices are more common in Nimar. Ujjain is the main ritual centre of Malwa and is an important devotional centre for the villagers; but many also go to Onkareshwar, another important centre to the south of the village in the Nimar region. Ambakhedi then, is a Malwa village but one which often looks towards Nimar.

Historically Malwa has been populated for several thousand years. Archaeological evidence indicates the existence of both palaeolithic and chalcolithic cultures which were present near Indore. There is also evidence of occupation by at least two different groups before an Aryan settlement (Shrivastav 1971: 33). In Buddha's time the Malwa region or part of it at least, was known as Avanti - one of the sixteen powers of India. The Maurya dynasty held Malwa among their Western provinces and in his father's time Ashoka was governor. He madehis capital at Ujjain one of the seven sacred cities of India. In the early Christian era the Sakas controlled the region. Thus from the earliest time the history of Malwa has been one of settlement and invasion, new groups coming into the area one after the other. The 1931 Census report sums this up when it describes Malwa 'as the invariable appanage to the domains of every monarch, native or barbarian who became master of the Gangetic plain' (1931 Census Vol. 22, Pt. 1, p.3). People were attracted to the region because it occupies a key position in routes from north to south of India and because the soil is fertile and the climate relatively mild. The composition of castes in Ambakhedi with subcastes from Gujerat, Rajasthan and UP as well as from Malwa and Nimar reflects the tradition of migration.

The migration is also reflected in the rise and fall of various dynasties within the Malwa region. The Gupta dynasty was founded in the early fourth century and its

most famous member was the legendary Chandragupta Vikramaditya (AD 376-411). Some of the villagers use the era named after him. This is the Vikram-Samvat which starts fifty seven years before the Christian era. Chandra Gupta's age was a golden one for Malwa and produced a flourishing of the arts. Kalidasa, author of Sakuntala, a celebrated Sanskrit play is perhaps the most renowned representative of the era.

The Rajputs first seem to have come to prominence in Malwa's history with the coming of the Paramara dynasty which held sway between 800-1200 AD. This warrior dynasty inspired such respect that there was a saying in the region that the world itself was the Paramara's true kingdom (Russel 1908: 103). Raja Bhoja was the most illustrious individual ruler of this period and Russel describes him as the 'Augustus of India' (Russel ibid.). It is not clear to what extent the Rajputs in Ambakhedi identify themselves with the historical Rajput dynasties, although certain symbols such as the sword carried by their grooms at weddings and the images of two warriors on horseback sometimes drawn to represent their gotrā suggest that they have some link with martial traditions. After Bhoja's death the power of the Paramara kings began to weaken with the onset of Muslim invaders and increased rivalries between the various chiefs in Malwa. Ala-ud-din and Iltutmish played a large part in gaining Malwa for the Muslims and by the beginning of the fourteenth century Malwa had become a Muslim fief under the Tughluq dynasty. However the chiefs of Malwa opposed this rule and there was sporadic unrest.

At the end of the fourteenth century, Dilwa Khan, the governor of Malwa, taking advantage of Timur's invasion of Delhi, gradually assumed the powers of an autonomous ruler. His successor Alp Khan also known as Hoshang Shah proclaimed himself as independent and moved his capital from Dhar to Mandu, from which period the beautiful palaces at Mandu date. The Khilji dynasty ruled Malwa for a quarter of a century.

It engaged in much military activity and was constantly warring with Gujarati rulers, Bhamani kings of the Deccan and other neighbouring chiefs. Mahmud II the last Khilji king was defeated in 1531 by the Shah of Gujarat. Malwa was then ruled by the viceroys of the Shah but this situation did not last long because in 1535 the Moghul invasions began. In 1561 Akbar invaded Malwa and captured Ujjain and the last ruler Baz Bahadur was driven away and Malwa became a province of the Moghul empire. The Moghuls had a more or less untroubled rule in Malwa until 1699 when the Maratha invasions began.

Thus although the region is basically Hindu it, like much of north and central India underwent a period of Muslim domination. Some authorities (eg. Altekar 1962: 166) suggest that it was Muslim and more particularly Moghul influence that led to the particular form of veiling that women observe in this region and much of north India. However it should be noted that as Jacobson points out (1970), Muslim and Hindu veiling are not identical.

It is with the Maratha invasions and the rise of the Holkar dynasty that one can move away from a general history of the Malwa region and focus on the Indore district. The Maratha generals carved out territories for themselves in the south of Malwa and rulers in other small princely states took advantage of the decline in Moghul power and became increasingly independent. Three families laid the foundation for the region's Maratha states:- the Puars at Dewas and Dhar, the Scindhia near Gwalior and the Holkars near Indore. Until 1741 despite increasing Maratha power there was still an official Moghul governor of Malwa but by this date the Imperial governor was so weak that Peshwar was given governorship of the province. The Holkars were first granted territories by the Peshwars in 1732. Indore is situated on a river and has a hill which provides useful natural defences. It is near important roads which link Agra and Delhi and Poona (Leshnik 1966). The Holkars chose Indore as their capital and their

power together with its site meant that from that time on it grew rapidly.

After 1761 and the defeat of the Maratha at Panipat, Maratha power began to weaken and Malwa as a whole was characterised by unrest. Various local rulers seized on the opportunity and revolted. The British eventually entered into treaty relations with various different rulers of these states in 1818 and after this time the boundaries including those of the Holkars were more or less frozen. The British never ruled directly in this area leaving much of the administration and local level power in the hands of princely rulers.

There followed a relatively untroubled period with major crises occurring in the severe famine of 1901, and an influenza epidemic in the 1920s. In 1948 India became independent and the 25 states of what was then known as Central India emerged to form the Indian Union of the State of Madhya Bharat. In 1956 this was dissolved to combine with parts of Bhudelkhand, Rajasthan and Bhopal to become the new Madhya Pradesh state.

Within Ambakhedi itself, Malwa's turbulent history is reflected and remembered in a number of different ways. The village had a Maratha family in it as many other villages do in the region but the family left Ambakhedi about 20 years ago. Apart from the caste composition and the history of the village itself there are the memories of the villagers. The Holkar family figure as the most prominent historical figures and of them Ahilya Bai (1735-95) is the most well-known. She is often referred to as a goddess and villagers go to an annual fair that has grown up near a temple she founded, in a nearby village.

The British presence in India is also remembered partly because a military cantonment was stationed at Mhow to the south of the village and parties of British visited the village to hunt. The fact that the parties were mixed and the women wore jodphurs is still a matter of some incredulity and

discussion among older villagers. The patel of the village remembers this period as one when 'the government' supported the power of his family and position; whereas nowadays the support goes to the elected representatives (see below).

THE VILLAGE: ITS HISTORY

There is no record of the founding of Ambakhedi and the villagers know of no traditional date. The oldest part of the village paradoxically is believed to be near the Hanuman temple on the outskirts of the village (area D, Fig. 4). This suggests that this high ground near the main roadway was settled first before the main settlement took place further away from the road in what is now the central area of the village. It is not possible to say when this move took place. The shrine of Sītalā Mātā, situated in the courtyard of a Rajput house is said to be the oldest spot in the centre and villagers point to the fact that silver coins and jewellry are occasionally found buried here. The shrines to Pāliyā Babā and Sati Mātā opposite the patel's house are also held to be among the oldest sites in the village.[6]

The headman's family is Purviya Rajput and they claim to have arrived four or five generations ago and to have displaced a people who originally inhabited Ambakhedi whom they describe as 'dacoits'. The Rajputs have a legend that they arrived from 'Aodiyah' a kingdom in the east in twelve bullock carts, setting up in twelve villages of which Ambakhedi is one. (They use this legend to justify a pattern of marriage within a circle of twelve villages).[7] The other members of the eighteen subcastes of the village all say they came after the Rajputs. Apart from arrivals within the past fifty years or so the only group who can provide a date for their arrival are the Jatav. They say they arrived from UP in 1749 and village tradition suggests they were the last major group to settle in the village indicating that the castes who form the majority of the village's composition

ie. the Jatav, the Purviya Rajputs, the Gari and the Balai had all settled here by the middle of the eighteenth century.

The legends of the villagers concerning their past cannot be backed up by written evidence but the history of migration and settlement and incoming groups displacing others seems to reflect Malwa's unsettled history. At a nearby village there is a bir, a stone monument set up to a local group some of whom died resisting invaders. It seems likely that this kind of event also occurred in Ambakhedi.

Records concerning early Hindu and Moghul periods of village history have been destroyed and later records are in the Modi script of Marathi (as are all records of Holkar State). They are thus inaccessible except to a few experts. The earliest records which I could consult were the 1925 patavari land records. These indicate that the basic caste composition then was much the same as it is today.

The existence of forested land to the north and south of the village stems from this area having been part of the hunting estate of the Holkars. From the 1850s onwards the Holkars took steps to check the erosion of the forests - however at times sections of the forest were sold off to new members of the village; or illegally cleared by villagers wanting more land for cultivation. These practices continued until fairly recently. The land is now under government control and although it is still occasionally enroached, a much tighter check is kept on it.

Records indicate that the land in Ambakhedi was always held as khālsā land. This was land held directly from the ruler of the Holkar estate in return for land revenue paid on it. The responsibility of land revenue collection fell on the patel. The majority of land in the Holkar estates was held in this manner. However about 5% of land in Ambakhedi was held differently. It was known as inām land. This was land which had been granted free of revenue to a family in return for a service previously performed for a

raja. In this case the land had been granted to a Brahman family who lived in Indore and who rented it out to various villagers. Most of this land was sold in government reforms limiting land holdings in the 1950s. Nowadays the taxes are collected by the patel but paid to the state government. The patel's importance has decreased with the growth of village pancayats (see below).

In the fifties some of the large estates to the north of the village were given up to the Kasturbagram Trust when a ceiling was set on landholdings. This trust has many links with the village.[8]

AMBAKHEDI AND ITS REGIONAL CONTACTS TODAY

As I shall show below Ambakhedi has contacts with many villages in the region and outside it through its extensive marriage network; however, apart from this, the place in the region to which it is most closely linked is Indore. Indore has a population of over half a million. Its main industry is textile and it is well-equipped with schools, hospitals, colleges, a university and shops. Locally it is sometimes referred to as a 'mini Bombay'. It is here that villagers go for major medical attention. It is here they buy manufactured goods such as bicycles, scooters, and other items such as cloth, and kerosene. The village shopkeepers get their supplies here. Farmers sell vegetables, milk and cash crops here and in addition some men from the village cycle to work here daily. Although the capital of M.P. is Bhopal, Indore is the district headquarters for Ambakhedi. It is to Indore that the villagers go for grants from central and local government. It is in Indore that problems arising about tax and legal matters are dealt with. It is through organisations and offices in Indore that the village is linked to state and national organisation. Women, being largely excluded from the kind of employment available to villagers in Indore, and not taking part in trade or

politics at this level, have far less contact with the city than do men.

Nevertheless Ambakhedi is not simply a satellite of Indore. There are two reasons for this. Firstly most people are still engaged in agricultural activities within the village. Secondly transport links between the village and city are poor. The nearest bus stop is at the roadside village on the main Indore Khandwa road. Other villages further away than Ambakhedi are either on a bus route or have organised a daily truck service for milk or vegetables to be taken to the city. These villages have more frequent contact with Indore.[9] In Ambakhedi milk is taken to the city by cycle and there is a bus service not too far away. This seems to have militated against the villagers or authorities organising more efficient transport links. Women are more limited by the transport arrangements than men since they do not have the option of cycling.

Ujjain with a population of over two hundred thousand still remains very much the ritual and cultural centre of the region. People from Ambakhedi go there for fairs and certain rituals. However as mentioned above Onkareshwar is also a significant ritual centre for them.

There are of course other villages and cities which have special significance for Ambakhedi. Many villagers express a wish to bathe in the Ganges at Delhi or Banares at least once before they die and older couples who can afford it, do make this pilgrimage. Local places such as a village near Indore where there is a shrine well-known for its healing powers and the village with the shrine of Ahilya Bai are also the object of smaller devotional journeys. However it is Onkareshwar and Ujjain that are seen as the nearest places of great religious significance and these are the places visited most frequently for religious purposes..

PART 2: SOCIAL STRUCTURE

POPULATION

The population of the village was 1400 in 1979.[10] Table 1 suggests it has been expanding fairly rapidly. I have been unable to obtain records for the village before the census of 1961. Within the Indore district of which Ambakhedi is part, such details are not recorded for individual villages before that date. I cannot therefore ascertain how long this expansion has been going on. The largely agriculturally based economy of the village seems to have adjusted to the growing population in several ways. Firstly more and more grazing and forest land has been used for cultivation to such a point that there is now a shortage of grazing land.[11] Secondly there is increased use of bought cattle feed at some times of the year, of fertilizer, of improved crop strains and with the coming of diesel pumps and electricity, of more extensive irrigation. Thirdly the population of Indore is also expanding and an increased demand for products such as milk has provided an additional source of livelihood for the villagers. Whether the population will be able to go on expanding without an increasingly large number of people finding work in Indore is uncertain. There is hardly any more land that can be put under cultivation, and farmers themselves see few opportunities for intensifying agriculture. What this will mean in terms of changing patterns of employment, family size and family structure remains to be seen. It is possible to imagine that more frequent use of birthcontrol techniques which villagers seem now increasingly to favour because of the perceived limits on sources of income may result in changing household structures which in turn may affect the position of women.[12]

The disproportionate sex ratio shown in Table 1 reflects the disproportion in the region as a whole. For example the sex ratio in MP in 1971 was 943 women for every

1000 men (ICSSR 1975: 143). The reasons for this ratio may be due to higher mortality among women both in infancy and child-bearing age suggesting that men receive preferential treatment in the allocation of food and medical services. However the evidence for this is not conclusive (see discussions in ICSSR 1975: 8 and Miller 1981). I have not included a breakdown of population by age since it is difficult to determine ages with accuracy. The lists of household composition given in Table 7 indicate the spread of women between different generations.

The disproportionate sex ratio seems to apply across most of the castes who comment on its existence. The Purviya Rajputs may be an exception since they claim there is a shortage of grooms for their brides, suggesting that in this caste the usual imbalance of sexes is reversed. It is not clear whether this is the case or the result of the demographic problems of this particular caste's marriage system which unlike other systems in the village requires marriages to be made within 12 villages (see below). I was not able to survey other villages and therefore cannot predict whether this imbalance will be long term or what effect it will have.

CASTE

The variety of castes in Ambakhedi and their different regional origins have already been mentioned. As Mayer points out '...it would be impossible to discuss any major aspect of the villager's life without mentioning his caste. The manner of rites he performs, often his occupation, the kind of social and economic relations he has with his fellow residents, all vary with caste membership' (Mayer 1973: 24). Table 2 lists the eighteen castes present in Ambakhedi. I give the names of the castes and their traditional occupations. In the following chapters I will use the Hindi names rather than those of the traditional occupations. Although some castes still follow these occupations many do not and so to refer to them in this way throughout would be misleading.

It should also be noted that although there are several Rajput groups in the village - ie. Rajput Thakurs, Purviya Rajputs and Rajput Yadavs, by far the largest group are the Purviya Rajputs so in accounts that follow when I simply refer to Rajputs this should always be read as Purviya Rajputs. Table 3 sets the caste composition of Ambakhedi in its regional context.

Since the term caste is notoriously difficult to translate accurately and different authors apply it to different groups, I will make clear here how I am using it. The names given in Table 2 were given by informants in answer to the question 'what is your jāt?'. Thus they gave their answers at the general level of Nai, Darzi etc. Further questioning was needed to reveal that in fact they identified themselves as the endogamous section of Nai, Darzi or whatever coming from a particular region. In doing so they identified themselves as members of what Mayer has referred to as 'subcastes', that is as part of a subcaste which is endogamous, named and separate from other subcastes (see Mayer 1973: 4). Thus the Malwi Balai see themselves as different from Nimar Balai and the different categories of Rajputs see themselves as different from one another; although outsiders might refer to them all as Rajputs. The two Brahman castes listed are also members of different subcastes.

Within the village the members of these subcastes have distinctive identities as groups, in that each subcaste and members of each subcaste in neighbouring villages form populations within which marriages can be made and/or within which kinlinks can be traced. Subcastes are endogamous and membership is usually inherited through both father and mother (but see Chapter 3). Most of the subcastes have councils made up, in some cases just of members of Ambakhedi itself, as in the case of the Gari, or of subcastes from several different villages as in the case of Rajputs and Jatavs. These councils are responsible for ensuring that rules and

norms about marriage regulations etc. are maintained and often in the case of untouchable groups such as the Balai and the Jatav for taking legal action against highcaste groups. Each subcaste is also assigned a distinctive ritual status which determines its position in the commensal hierarchy observed in the village. Thus at the local level subcastes form an effective grouping capable of taking collective action and with a collective status.

It can be seen from Table 2 that four castes dominate the village numerically, - the Purviya Rajputs who form 27% of the population, the Gari who form 14%, the Balai who form 14% and the Jatav who form 17%. The village's hereditary headman - the patel - is Rajput and most Rajputs are landowners and own cattle. They gain most of their income from farming and usually employ one or two permanent servants (naukar) for agricultural work as well as labourers (majdūr) for weeding, harvesting etc. The Garis are in a similar situation and this caste is rapidly gaining prestige, especially since the elected representative of five local villages - ie. the sarpamc (see below) is a member of this caste. The Balai and the Jatav are untouchable. Few Balai have enough land to obtain their living entirely from it, therefore most work as labourers or servants on the farms of the Gari and the Rajputs. The situation is much the same among most of the Jatav but four or five households here have acquired enough land to put themselves on a level comparable with the Rajput and Gari farmers rather than their low caste fellows. It is not clear how this came about but one result seems to be that the Jatav as a group tend to be more vociferous in their complaints against high castes than the Balai.

The Jatav act independently of the rest of the village on many occasions; they have their own Holi fire and their own special Janm Astmi celebrations (Appendix 2 provides some details of the festivals). Their rituals and their dialect differ from the rest of the village and unlike the

Balai who traditionally provided midwives for the village and who used to perform certain other services such as collecting wood for the cremation pyre,[13] they did not traditionally perform these kind of services for the rest of the village.

The other castes in the village occupy a variety of social and economic niches. The Rajput Yadavs and Thakurs are landholders on a par with the Purviya Rajputs and Garis. The Nai (barber) performs his traditional occupation as well as owning some land and acting a village watchman. The position of the Lohar (iron smith) is similar. One of the Telis owns a small shop (the rest are owned by Rajputs) and most of the rest work as labourers. The Darzi (tailor) family have a large amount of land and continue their traditional occupation of tailoring. This family is upwardly mobile and contains the most educated men of the village, one of whom has an MA. The Camars (leather workers) still do leatherwork making shoes and removing dead carcasses - work that is considered highly polluting. The Brahmans act as priests for the village while most of the other castes are labourers, work in Indore or in what occupations they can find nearby.

Transactions between members of different castes are now largely conducted on a cash basis. The Lohar and the Darzi for example take cash for services rendered. However, the Balai midwife is usually paid in grain. The Camars (leatherworkers) and the Nai (barbers) follow kāmīn occupations. They are paid partly in cash and partly in kind. They will be given annual gifts of grain for the services they perform for the village as a whole but will be paid in cash or sometimes grain for individual services such as the shoes the Camar makes and the Nai's services at a particular wedding (cf. Mayer 1973: 71). The Brahman's work is termed mangat and on full and new moon days he goes round the village and is given grain and other uncooked food stuffs. Farmers also give him grain at harvests. Families will give

him additional presents for performing such rites as marriage, sacred readings and mortuary rituals (cf. Mayer op. cit.). I give this simplified account of the distribution of wealth and labour between castes for two reasons. Firstly it shows that although caste and economic occupation are not inextricably linked, to be a member of a certain caste in Ambakhedi suggests that a person is likely to be in a certain economic position. Secondly in my accounts of rituals and statements by informants there may be reference to the caste of the informant or the caste that does the ritual. This classification of caste by economic status provides useful contextual material.

I was able to work with almost all the different subcastes in the village and the data presented in rituals in the thesis are based on material from all eighteen subcastes except for the Bhilala. Data on this group are lacking for several reasons. Firstly many Bhilala men and women worked as labourers and their homes were often empty when I was available to interview them and it proved impractical to talk to them during their work. Also several families lived in the houses near the wells of their employers which made them difficult to interview. Second and more important they were at the bottom of the status ladder in the village. They were classified as untouchable by all castes because it was believed that they were settled tribals.[14] Unlike other low caste groups they were extremely self-conscious about their status and unwilling to talk about or let me see rituals. I suspect that this was because many of these rituals still had tribal elements which they did not want known in the context of the more Hindu customs of the village. Therefore the Bhilala although numerically a large group (7%) do not form part of the analysis of rituals and customs that follows.

So far I have described castes in terms of their size and the kind of economic occupation members are likely to follow. I have also mentioned that they may act collectively following decisions taken by the caste council. There is one

more major issue concerning castes that needs to be described, that is the ritual status of castes. This is particularly interesting insofar as it shows the importance of purity and pollution in the social structure, and thus has relevance for understanding female purity and pollution. Mayer writes of the ritual status of castes in Ramkheri, the Malwa village he studied in 1955 as follows:

> The caste groups in Ramkheri are at the same time status groups. In some activities - eg. political and economic members of a caste do not always combine, and the strength of the connection between caste membership and group status varies. But this is not the case in what one may call the ritual sphere; here caste groups form the units in what is as systematic a set of relationships as it is possible to have in a situation where other factors (demographic, economic, etc.) are also relevant.
>
> (Mayer 1973: 33)

There is a hierarchy which is organised round the assumption that each caste has an inherent ritual purity which can be polluted by contact with a caste of lesser purity than itself. This contact can simply be in terms of touch so that members of high castes will avoid touching the lowest castes wherever possible. More specifically ideas about the transmission of pollution are conceived in terms of receiving or not receiving food cooked or handled by another caste and 'there are gradations according to the type of food, the container in which it is served etc.' (Mayer op. cit.).

Whether a caste is considered pure or impure depends broadly in the first instance on the nature of its traditional occupation and its dietary and other habits. Thus the Brahman who is the most pure is vegetarian and his tasks are linked with the purity associated with temples. The Camar is a leather worker and works with the defiling products of the dead cow - he is also rumoured to eat this cow

and thus is seen as extremely polluting. It is the traditional occupation of the group that counts not whether or not they still follow it. Jatavs are no longer leather-workers but are still regarded as polluting. Similarly the Balai have given up some of their more polluting traditional occupations but other castes still regard them as untouchable.

It is extremely difficult to summarise the occupations or processes that make castes impure and even harder to summarise the list of things that make things pure. The following list adapted from Stevenson (1954: 63) is useful. The main principles are (i) that the life principle is pure and that the destruction of life for a living (as in oil seed crushing) is polluting; (ii) that death and decay are polluting and therefore occupational association with them is polluting; (iii) that all human emissions are polluting and therefore occupational association with these too is polluting; (iv) that the cow is pure above all creatures, and that killing it, or flaying it, or dealing in skins, or eating its flesh is sinful, and therefore polluting; (v) that certain other creatures - some monkeys, cobras, squirrels are also sacred in varying degrees and in some localities and killing or eating them is polluting and that drinking alcohol is polluting. I mention these things here because they are related to the discussion in following chapters of the ways in which women are impure. Women's impurity is related to more general ideas about purity and impurity.

Middle ranking castes often rank their occupation with reference to the four classical divisions (varn) - Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Sudra which 'formed the head, arms, thighs and feet respectively of Brahma' and made up 'the priestly mercantile and servile sections of society' (Mayer 1973: 61). Rajputs claim to be above the Darzi (tailors) because they are Kshatriya or warriors while the Darzi are only Vaisya or merchants. Thus the ritual states of castes are classified as

we can see with reference both to social definitions of biological and organic processes and to ideas about the dharma (see Chapter 3) or inherent moral duty of the caste, according to the varn classifications. This is a pattern which will recur when one comes to look at the ritual states of women.

These then are the broad principles underlying the ritual status of castes. On a day to day basis, the effective ritual hierarchy in the village is most clearly expressed in what Mayer has called the 'commensal hierarchy' which very simply can be described as who eats food from whom, and who will take water from whom. Basically there are two types of food - kaccā food, literally unripe food, which is cooked in water and salt and transmits pollution very easily and pakkā food, which is made with clarified butter, and since it transmits pollution less easily can be taken from more castes. The commensal hierarchy of the village is shown in Table 4. It should be noted that with regard to ritual state it is group membership that is all important not an individual's status. Figure 4 indicates how this affects residence patterns within the village but it should be noted that members of castes belonging to castes divisions 1, 2, and 3 will all draw water from the same wells. They will not draw water from the wells in the untouchable neighbourhoods. The Balai and Jatav will not take water from each other's wells and are not permitted near the wells in the area A. They will also not take water from the Camar wells or from wells near Bhilala houses near the Hanuman temple.

To review, the endogamous subcastes present in Ambakhedi form one of the most obvious sources of social grouping within the village. The castes are ranked with regard to each other on grounds of ritual purity and study of commensal behaviour, reveals the way in which the hierarchy is built up. However the division which most obviously effects village life in matters such as politics and residence

is the division between the high and middle castes, and the untouchable castes. The principles of purity, pollution, and caste membership are thus an important part of the organisation of the 'moral community'.

ECONOMIC ORGANISATION

As the foregoing remarks on caste suggest, the major occupations of the village are agricultural. The soils vary from the rich black Malwa soils through less fertile brown soils to more rocky soils towards the hills. The most fertile soils provide two harvests (this accounts for 19% of the total cultivable land). The main crops grown are maize, millet, wheat, potatoes, sugar, cane, lentils, and groundnuts. In addition some families have started to grow soya bean and one or two others still grow cotton but this is considered too labour intensive by most people. Small amounts of other vegetables such as aubergines or tomatoes are grown both for home consumption and for marketing in Indore. Most farmers grow enough of all the major crops to sell at least some of them as cash crops. Although the village is more or less self sufficient in food, cash is needed for many different purchases in the city in particular, for such commodities, as cloth and kerosene.

Table 5 gives some indication of the timing and planting of the various crops and from this it can be seen that the most intensive periods of activity are in late June or just after the start of the rains when much planting is done. After this, most crops need to be weeded three or four times, the main harvest periods are from late September to December and early January and the wheat harvest occurs in April. Between April and late June there is a lull in farming activity and this is one of the reasons why so many marriages take place in this period.

Most women in the village work in the fields except for the very old and the Brahman woman who is the only woman

in a large household and appears so occupied by household activities that she has no time. Some of the Darzi women do not go to the fields, but stay in the home finishing off garments produced by the menfolk. Women work either as labourers in someone else's fields or in their own fields where at times they may even supervise the work of mixed parties of labourers. All men and women recognize the major contribution that women make to agricultural labour. In general planting work can be done by both men and women. Weeding work is usually done only by women (it is also badly paid in comparison with other labouring tasks). Harvesting is done by both men and women but ploughing is usually only done by men. Certain women in the village admitted that when the necessity arose they actually ploughed themselves but most people consider it a male task. Other male only tasks include operating the sugar presses. There are no tractors in the village although these days threshing machines are hired and used. Both men and women operate the threshing machines.

The other major agricultural activity in the village concerns cattle. There are over 1300 head of cattle in the village (including oxen as well as milk animals) and the village sends approximately three hundred litres of milk daily to Indore. Both women and men do the milking but it is usually men who are responsible for taking the cattle out to graze partly because this can be a solitary occupation taking the herder far away from the village and in general women are reluctant to undertake this kind of work because they are fearful of assault or attack. This is similar to their dislike of living in isolated farmsteads.

Apart from men in agricultural occupations, 28 men (of whom just under half are Balai) work in Indore. Seven men work in the cotton mills there and the others are involved in a variety of different tasks most of them involving manual work except for one man with a matriculation certificate, who works in the agricultural department. 17 other

people have jobs that take them outside Ambakhedi. Two men already mentioned have shops at the village near Ambakhedi on the Khandwa road. Other people work for the Kasturbagram Trust, the Public Works Department (involved in the clearance of roads and ditches), at a nearby forestry depot and at the power house.

No women work in Indore. It is too far for them to travel daily given that it is considered immodest for women to cycle. However, one woman has a permanent job as a labourer for the Public Works Department, and works on roads near the village. She is a middle-aged widow and her absence from the village to work with mixed labouring gangs is not the subject of much criticism because of her age. Other women say that criticism and suspicion prevents them from working outside the village although occasionally groups of Teli and Lodhi women will obtain casual work at the forestry depot. They argue that because they go together they are not worried about the contact with strange men that their work brings them into.

Within the village individuals can earn money apart from that gained from agricultural work in a number of ways. One or two men in the village contract to do small carpentry jobs. The Lohars follow their traditional craft of ironwork in addition to farming. The same is true of the Camars (leatherworkers) and Darzi (tailors). One Balai woman also earns some money by acting as a healthworker for the various charitable schemes run by a nearby private hospital.

It will be seen from this that women's main work is agricultural. They are not involved in trading or craft occupations to a great extent and the difficulties of transport, considerations about modesty and personal honour (nām) prevent them from seeking what little paid employment there is outside the village. In some sense then they are less affected by modernisation, as epitomised by life in big cities like Indore, than their menfolk. This perhaps provides additional

justification for looking at the way gender identity is constructed and expressed in rituals and beliefs that occur within the village community for women are still very affected by the traditional values that exist within this community.

As the section on the division of occupation by caste suggested, there are differences in wealth within the village, the biggest landholders owning forty to fifty acres and being able to build concrete houses and buy motor cycles or scooters while the small landholders and wage labourers can only manage mud houses and bicycles. However the differences of wealth are not as great as elsewhere in India. One indication of this being that most women work in the fields. The few who do not contribute to their family's income in other ways - for example in the Darzi and Camar households, the women help in the family craft. In other households where there are many more men than women, household tasks become so onerous that there is little time for the woman to go to the fields. No woman has a domestic servant and all women do their own housework. In other parts of India, Wadley (1975) and Fruzetti (1975) have described a situation where the richer women at least live a fairly enclosed life only going out occasionally and then heavily veiled: but the economic structure of Ambakhedi makes the situation of women here somewhat different. I emphasise this, since one of the themes of the thesis is the dangerousness of female sexuality, which is often equated with a mistrust of women. It should be noted that this is not the mistrust of women who are locked up and have little opportunity to misuse their sexuality but mistrust of women who move about the village, if not freely, then at least frequently and opportunities for misconduct do arise.

The economic division of labour means that for most women the day runs as follows: At 4.30am when cyclists arrive from Indore to collect the milk they get up. Men or women may do the milking. Then the cattle are taken out to the fields and the women clean the house, light the stove to

prepare tea and collect the cowdung to make intocakes that are used for fuel. Members of the household then wash out their mouths with water and drink tea. Women then fetch water, - and although men do draw water when they have to, this is defined as a female task. Then a main meal is prepared usually consisting of roti and vegetables and some lentils. The women prepare it, serve the men who are still in the household or send some of the children with their portion to the fields and then eat themselves before going to the fields. Old women may stay behind, as well as women who have a substantial amount of wheat to clean or clothes to wash or some other household task. If there are very young children one woman of the household may stay behind to look after them. In the evening the women return from the fields, fetch more water, prepare an evening meal which they serve to men and then eat and after this they sleep. The combination of household and agricultural tasks mean that although women move about the village, they are seldom idle and have less opportunity than men to meet one another casually in groups, for unlike men they have household tasks in addition to their agricultural work.

Women's contribution to the economic aspects of the village life is vital but they are excluded in the main from acquiring capital. They do not own the land they work, they tend not to own cattle and they cannot often take the opportunity to build up savings by undertaking lucrative wage work in the city. Thus their interest in property and what can loosely be termed capital assets is their interest and relationship to the men who own these assets. This seems to parallel the situation in ritual where an individual woman's interest and well-being depend upon her relationship with a man.

EDUCATION

The division of labour affects people's ideas about education. It is considered desirable nowadays for boys to have at least basic literacy and numeracy skills but most

parents consider such education for girls a waste of time since they 'will work in the home and in the fields'. They also add that an illiterate mother-in-law would not welcome literate daughters-in-law. In 1979 the village school register showed that 71 boys attended and only 13 girls. Of the 151 adults (people over fifteen) who described themselves as literate, only 17 were women. Many men had at least a couple of years of secondary education and a few had gone to college. Only three young tailor wives and one Thakur woman had taken secondary education at all. People argued that even if a girl could read, education, beyond the basic skills acquired in the years up to the fifth grade, was unnecessary. The situation is further exacerbated in that education after the fifth grade means attendance in schools away from the woman's natal village and in mixed classes. Parents do not approve of these conditions, particularly since at this time the girl is likely to be approaching puberty. Most marriages for girls occur about then and although a girl does not go immediately to live in her conjugal home (see Chapter 5) her visits there are disruptive to her education. This lack of education for women coupled as it is with their relative lack of opportunity to visit the city means that often women's horizons do not stretch beyond the village network of which they are part.

In addition as far as the rituals they perform are concerned, they themselves can rarely link them to any textual sources or authorities. It is fair to say that most men are unable to do this either but there were several particularly religious men, apart from the Brahmans, who are far more conscious of the myths, and texts associated with Hinduism and who are able to talk about them at length. However since these men were seldom concerned with the ritual domain of the women, they could not often help in shedding light on rituals performed by women.

POLITICAL ORGANISATION

The description of the village under this heading will be brief because by and large women do not take part in the political activities of the village.[15] There is universal suffrage and women have the legal right to vote in the formal assemblies described below. However, they do not appear to regard this power as important and most say that they vote as their husbands tell them to - if they vote at all.

The lack of political involvement by women seems to be for two main reasons. The first is that many of them feel they belong both to their natal and conjugal villages and so do not identify particularly with the political interests of either. Secondly women take little part in village or caste council meetings because the veiling requirements associated with the kinship system and the ideals of modesty do not encourage them to stand up and speak formally in front of a group of men. An official local council made up of representatives of five villages (the Gram Pancayat) does indeed contain the two women required by law but according to informants (I was never able to attend) they say little. One of them is an extremely outspoken Balai woman from Ambakhedi. I asked her why she had been nominated and she said 'Because people say I have no śarm (the word for shyness or embarrassment). In fact she said that although normally she is less inhibited in speaking in the presence of groups of men than other women are, she too remains quiet at public meetings. Thus women do not act as a group with defined interests in the public arena of village political life or take part in discussions on behalf of other groups or factions.

Moreover despite playing so little part in the public political life of the village, they do not appear to have their own parallel system of authority with elder women as arbiters of small disputes, as is common in many cultures where women are excluded from the main political system (see for example Wolf, M. 1974: 162). The reasons

for this are complex but are most likely to do with the way the kinship system divides women among themselves (see below). It is difficult to assess how far women are important at an even more informal level. It does not seem to be to a great extent in that most women questioned about disputes usually expressed ignorance or were frankly uninterested.

The formal system means that there is a village council (pancayat) which is elected and which acts on behalf of the village in matters concerning collective village expenditure and action. Thus it meets to decide about such matters as the building of a new village school, the question of maintenance of street lighting and so on. There are seven wards in Ambakhedi and each elects one pamc to be a member of the council. These men then are the formally elected leaders of the village and are usually those who deal with outside authorities, who come into the village. In addition it happened that in 1979 the sarpamc, head of the Gram Pancayat was from Ambakhedi. As head of this council he had more authority and prestige than the other pamcs and was usually treated as one of the most important men in the village.

Formally the village leader was the patel (a hereditary headman appointed by the Maharaja). It was he who represented the village to all outsiders. Today he only has residual powers which include being responsible for the collection of taxes. A patavari (accountant) from outside the village is employed to keep the village accounts. The patel's former leadership is still in evidence in that he conducts certain rituals for the welfare of the village as a whole. He is also usually involved on dealings with any important outsiders who come to the village.

As far as day-to-day settlement of disputes is concerned, the pamc, sarpamc, the patel and certain older men in the village including the village watchman (caukīdār) may act informally to try and reach a settlement. However the village council has no judicial authority. Criminal and civil matters

not cleared up by informal agreements have to be taken to the Nyaya Pancayat which is a council consisting of elected members from a number of different Gram Pancayats, Cases dealing with sums of money over a certain amount and certain types of criminal cases are dealt with by other courts in Indore. These days villagers seem quick to take all kinds of disputes beyond village level even to the extent of calling in police from Indore. The village is not an autonomous unit as far as dispute settlement is concerned. Women are sometimes involved as individuals in disputes over the possession of land or in quarrels about theft but once a dispute escalates much beyond the level of a particular area in the village they take no formal role.

Politically the main divisions in the village are those between the upper and middle castes and the Harijans.[16] The latter groups have been quick to take advantage of much of the national legislation on their behalf and when I left a dispute was in process about the entry of these castes to the three main temples in the centre of the village. Thus although national legislation has sought to remove some discrimination on grounds of impurity of castes, this area is still a matter for power struggles within Ambakhedi as elsewhere in India.

Throughout the thesis I shall argue that it is only marriage and a woman's links to a living man which give her a defined position in the 'moral community' , even although female power is valued and has a distinctive role in this community. Women's virtual exclusion from the political institutions which play a part in regulating differing power interests within community, suggest that she does not have a defined interest in this aspect of the community except through her husband.

THE KINSHIP SYSTEM

Throughout the examination of the effect of kinship on a woman's ritual state, stress will be laid on the fact that a woman has filiation with two kinship groupings, ie. those of her conjugal and natal family and this is one of the facts that makes her position in her husband's family ambiguous. Since such a central part of the argument concerns a woman's inbetween position, I shall now describe the nature of the kinship groupings. The topic is complex but schematically for our purposes the kinship groupings can be looked at at four levels, that of gotrā, khāndān, kutumb, and household (ghar).[17]

1) Gotra. Subcastes are divided into exogamous sections which the villagers refer to as gotra. The gotra has a dispersed membership throughout the subcaste and is based 'on agnatic ties putatively assumed from the patrilineal succession' (Mayer 1973: 161) to a common gotra-goddess , as well as on records of the gotra's genealogist. A man is a member of his father's gotra. A woman is a member of her father's gotra until marriage when she also acquires membership of her husband's gotra. Opinion varied in the village as to what extent she did in fact retain membership of her natal gotra. Some people argued that she lost her membership completely while maintaining blood links with her family. Others said that she in fact acquired two gotras at marriage becoming a wife and daughter-in-law in one and remaining a sister and daughter in another. This they said was why a woman and her husband could worship Mai Mata the other goddess of the gotra in the wedding (see Chapter 5).

Mayer translates the term gotra as clan but I prefer to leave it as an indigenous term. This is because as Madan has pointed out, to translate it as clan invites comparison with clans in other societies - particularly

Africa where clans are rather different. Madan suggests that 'it becomes imperative that for a group to be called 'clan', it is not sufficient that principle of unilineal descent is present; nor is it necessary that it should be exogamous. It must at least (his italics) be a grouping of kinsfolk in some specific sense (his italics)' (Madan 1962: 67). Since as Madan points out '...the fact of a common gotra makes their inter-relations with each other different only in one way from their relations with other, unconnected families: they may not enter into marital alliances'. The use of the term clan for gotra does not seem justified and is confusing if cross-cultural comparison is made.

The question then arises as to why so much attention should be focussed on the fact that a woman seems to have dual membership of groups which are not action groups but rather reference groups. It seems that this is because while gotra itself is not an action group it serves to represent a group that is united by interest and co-operation - the unilineal descent group usually referred to as khandan or bhaibhandh. This grouping has no name - gotras are named[18] and no deities are associated with it. Gotras are associated with specific deities notably their kul devi and a particular shrine of Bheru. Thus the symbols of gotras serve to give ritual expression to the less formally articulated but more effective groups. The most striking incidence of this occurred when a Rajput woman complained about the behaviour of a man of her natal gotra towards her son. Her complaints were vocal and she was soon criticised by others because as sister and daughter of the gotra, she should not act against the interests of a member of that gotra. Discussion of the criticism revealed it was not so much the classificatory membership of the gotra that was at stake but that she was a member of his unilineal descent group through her natal connections. People used gotra as

a symbol for membership of a lower level grouping. Thus when I talk about the ambiguities and problems entailed in a woman's membership of two gotras I shall be using the word in the context of the connotations that it seems to have for the villagers, that is, as something that is used in a wider sense than simply to define exogamous sections, within subcastes.[19]

2) Khandan: Khandan or sometimes bhaibandh usually refers to 'a descent group with a depth of three or four generations in which descent is calculable' (Mayer 1973: 167). This group has no precise boundaries or criteria of membership and its composition is largely determined by an individual's view of it. Thus the Purviya Rajputs who only marry within a group of twelve villages are very much aware of its significance since there are numerous members of this group living in Ambakhedi and neighbouring villages.

For groups like the Brahmans and Khunbis who come from Nimar, this grouping is not so large or important for the nearest members of their khandan live some way away. Thus they may not be able to name many people in this category. However for the four main castes in the village, the Rajputs, Balai, Gari and Jatav, the large numbers of them within the village and in neighbouring villages, make it an important grouping. For them it is a grouping where 'there is actual co-operation, or a history of co-operation', - (Mayer 1973: 167). That it can cause conflicting loyalties for women has been illustrated by the situation of the Rajput woman described above.

3) Kutumb. In his discussion of kinship groupings in Ramkheri Mayer includes another level of grouping, that of kutumb or parivār - the 'family'. Villagers do use this term to refer to what Mayer has described as 'an extended family whose members recognize agnatic ties in some circumstances and uterine links in others' (Mayer 1973: 170). This grouping is different from the two described above because

it is not so strongly structured by the rules of patrilineal descent and therefore a woman is not 'caught' in-between in the same way that she is in the two groups above. Indeed very often her brother as māmā (mother's brother) is included within this category and his co-operation can be seen in terms of advice and sometimes financial loans. It is a very shadowy grouping depending on personal liking and history as well as locality and to an extent this is what determines precisely which uterine and agnatic links are activated.

4) Ghar. The smallest effective kinship grouping in the village is the household usually referred to as ghar. This is the residential family unit often comprising several generations and different sets of siblings (see below). It centres round a common cooking hearth, and within one ghar, members co-operate and share out different domestic and agricultural tasks. Usually income from fields and labouring activities are pooled within the ghar, when the joint family splits (see below) it is then that any owned land will be shared out between brothers. Women do not usually inherit land. However in the Rajput, Gari, Teli, Thakur and Darzi families, a widow will be allocated a portion of land when it is divided out between her sons but this land is inalienable and is re-divided between her sons on her death. Women may also inherit land if a man has no son. So, while a household stays together it forms a corporate landholding group, of which men are full members but women have only limited rights.

Ritually too the household is a significant unit for domestic rituals are performed for the household as a whole rather than for individual members. At weddings, the entry of a woman into and out of the house is marked and symbolizes her passing between two groups. At this level a woman's dual allegiances are clearly marked, particularly since her allegiance to her

natal home may cause some women to 'steal' money or food from their conjugal home to take to their natal kin. Here a woman's dual allegiance may mean problems about the allocation of material resources. One man put it very simply: 'Women are cunning because they eat in two houses'.

In addition, this is the unit that is most closely identified with the good or bad reputation (nam) of its individual members. A woman may bring sarm (shame) to her natal home as well as her conjugal home if she behaves badly and her dual allegiance seems to trap her into not behaving badly even although she may dislike members of her conjugal household.

Women, particularly younger married women can be said to be members of both households because most are able to return to their natal homes frequently and for fairly long periods.[20] How often they are able to do so depends as Jacobson has pointed out on 'age, caste, the strength of bonds of affection between women and her various kinsmen, wealth, distance between natal and conjugal villages, size and composition of the household, the work expected of a woman in the two households, the nature of the purdah she observes and the health of the women and her relatives'. (Jacobson 1977 : 276). Most women return home for at least some major festivals and many return to their natal home for the birth of their first baby and for most life cycle rites and festivities occurring there.

To review, it can be seen from this that the most clearly definable kingroups are the households. It is here that women's dual allegiance can cause most tension particularly because it is in the context of the groups that material resources are allocated, local reputations made or lost and most daily activity is organised. The boundaries of the kutumb/parivar are more vaguely defined so that a woman's interstitial position in this group is more comparable to a

man's and does not seem to generate much tension. Indeed her brother's contact with the conjugal family is often welcomed. Within the khandan, if an effective grouping exists at this level a woman's interstitial position may create problems but these do not come to the fore so frequently. The position of women within gotras is also ambiguous but since a whole gotra does not form an action set a woman's connections with two gotras seem to symbolize her dual filiation at the levels of ghar and khandan.

RESIDENCE PATTERNS

The expressed ideal is that women should marry outside their villages[21] and that after the consummation of a marriage, residence should be virilocal. People justify this on the grounds that people of the same village are brother and sister and also the presence of affines may exacerbate possible tensions between husband and wife. Parents try to arrange marriages for their daughters in villages far enough way from Ambakhedi so that girls will not be reminded daily of life in their natal home and thus torn by split loyalties; but not so far as to make visits home prohibitive (see below).

A few married women do live in their natal village. Out of 287 adult married women, only 27 both lived in and were born in Ambakhedi. 11 of these women married men who lived outside the village and then subsequently moved into Ambakhedi with their husbands after some trouble in their conjugal village, such as involvement in a very serious dispute or more commonly lack of work there. They do not live with the women's parents and are financially independent of them but most need links with their wife's kin to buy land or to find other work in Ambakhedi.

6 women had left or been deserted by their husbands and had returned to their natal village to live with their parents. Among most castes, nāthrā, a form of second marriage,

is accepted for women although they cannot undertake the full ceremonies of a wedding a second time as a man can. During the course of my study, one of the six remarried and left the village and it seems likely that at least one of the others will. The point to be noted here is that in case of a broken marriage, a woman can and does return to her natal village. It is sometimes difficult to establish whether a woman can in fact be classified as living in Ambakhedi in her conjugal village. If there are some difficulties in marriage she may return home to her natal family for a festival and then refuse to go back, or her parents may refuse to send her back unless they receive certain assurances from her conjugal home. Alternatively her conjugal family may be unwilling to have her back. Thus the fact that she can 'eat in two houses' means that once the marriage has been consummated her pattern of residence may indicate the nature of her relationship with in-laws and how enduring the marriage tie is likely to be (Jacobson 1977: 283). Her membership of two homes gives both parties some room to manoeuvre. However, women who stay in their natal homes for over six months for no apparent reason can be classified with some certainty as having a broken marriage.

Four women lived in their natal village because they had married men of the natal village although in three cases their own father or the father of their spouse had come from outside the village originally, so it was not seen in the same light as having married a more established member of Ambakhedi. In the fourth case the woman had married outside Ambakhedi the first time and then had come back to the village for a second marriage.

In three cases widows had been badly treated by their in-laws and had sought refuge with their parents although normally widows live with the conjugal family since their main economic rights are seen as being based in the family. Finally, three couples lived on land that had been inherited by the woman because her father had no son. A woman retains a residual interest in the property of her natal

family, but this only manifests itself when there is no direct male heir.

All these married women were readily identifiable because the norms about veiling and modesty (see below) meant they could move about the village with considerably more freedom than women who had married into the village from elsewhere. The position of the husbands of the women was more ambiguous because many did not have agnatic links in the village and although people saw the practicality of men using their wife's kin ties, there was a feeling that in an ideal world this would not happen. However that adult women could and did live in their natal homes shows the way in which their dual filiation to kin groups can be used in a practical way when patrilineally orgnanised groupings do not provide sufficient support.

The preference for village exogamy means that, because of a woman's dual allegiance, my study is not simply of the women of one village but of women who have connections with a number of different villages. 257 women who have their conjugal home in Ambakhedi (roughly 50% of all married women) come from 107 different villages and towns. Most of these are in a thirty mile radius of Ambakhedi and most are within the Malwa region. This gives some indication of the regional spread the study could reasonably be expected to apply to. Also with the advent of bus services, few women have a home more than half a day's journey away. This indicates the ease with which most women can reach their natal homes.

One or two castes are exceptions to this general pattern. The Rajput Thakurs have a more widely spread marriage network with their women coming from as far away as 170 miles to the north. By contrast the Purviya Rajputs have a very tight knit area of marriage selection. They only make marriages within a group of twelve villages. An analysis of 74 Rajput marriages shows that only one was outside the twelve village group and this was to a Rajput who had only recently moved away from one of the twelve villages. While

among most of the major castes no more than five women ever come from any one village or town; among the Rajputs the numbers of women coming from one village are much higher. There is one small town to the south of Ambakhedi which has a large proportion of Rajputs and is thought of as one of 'the 12 villages.' 32 of the 74 married women interviewed came from this town. One of the results of this is that Rajput women are far more likely to marry into places where they already have relatives. What this means in terms of their perceptions of their conjugal village and households as compared to women of other castes is a question that I will hope to consider elsewhere.

Table 6 indicates the spread of marriages among the castes. Apart from the small town into which Rajput women marry, the only other major concentration of marriage ties is the 23 women who come from Indore and this seems largely explained by its size and proximity.

The reason that women come from so many different villages lies largely in the marriage rules followed by castes in Ambakhedi. As stated previously one must marry into the same caste and outside the same gotra. In addition it is generally held that matches should not be made if any of the following gotras are held in common - the mother's natal gotra, and both their maternal and paternal grandmother's natal gotra. In general people do not favour marriages where people can trace a shared ancestor to the fifth generation on the male side and the third generation on the female side (cf. Mayer 1973: 203). Such rules are not always adhered to especially if the relations are forgotten and the Rajputs themselves admit that they are less careful about observing this kind of exogamy than other castes because of the necessity to marry within the twelve villages.[22]

Other factors which contribute to the spread of natal villages are certain rules concerning affines. The Rajput Yadavs, Jatavs, and Telis will not give women to members of

gotras from whom they have taken wives since they see wife taking gotra as superior to the wife giving. Only the Rajputs, Lohars and Lodhi's will take wives from families households where they have sent daughters. Other castes do not favour this since they say the relations are too close and criticise the three castes that perform marriages in this way. They also point to the fact that if a sister marries into a household from where a brother has taken a wife, normal tensions occurring because of the allegiance of women to two homes become magnified. There are no rules about two sisters not marrying ~~to~~ in the same household but again people do not like to do this for quarrels between brothers within the joint family may affect the relation between sisters and perhaps sour their links with their natal homes. The tensions a woman feels in her conjugal home, contrast with a woman's relations with her natal family which are generally fairly relaxed and women value this for themselves and for their daughters.

Apart from the fulfillment of these requirements men and women are usually also 'matched' in terms of the wealth and reputation of families concerned, the quality of their ancestory and various other factors affecting status. All these considerations mean that a fairly large pool of villages is needed to ensure that the majority of the requirements should be fulfilled. The differing villages from which women come mean that they Have not lived together as children, nor have they had the opportunity to build up long term friendships while they were young and this militates against the women of the village being able to organise together to form a collective group.

HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION

Table 7 shows 92% of village population analysed according to the kind of household in which they live. (Reliable data were not obtainable for the remaining population).

The world of women centres on the household and a description of household types provides some idea of how relations in the household are constituted. Much could be said about the table but here I will simply summarize the features that seem most significant. It should be noted that the household types often represent stages in the developmental cycle of families rather than being discrete types. Kolenda's terminology itself indicates this. Thus a subnuclear household may at one time have been a nuclear family and so on.

More people live in, and more households are of, the nuclear type than any other. All married couples live virilocally except for the 14 described above. This indicates the importance of the basic parent child unit which forms the core of most households and also of the principle of virilocal residence. The existence of sub-nuclear, supplemented sub-nuclear and the supplemented nuclear family also indicate the importance of this basic unit.

At the same time 60 households can be classified as joint families with at least two adult males co-operating in work and pooling resources in each. 596 people live in some kind of joint household. This provides evidence that this family type is not as important as an ideal in people's minds, but exists in some number in reality. In general both men and women saw certain advantages in staying in a joint household so that resources in land and labour could be pooled. However at the same time most also thought that such pooling often resulted in unfair distribution of goods and work and in such settings quarrels could break out and many of the nuclear families in the survey had left joint households for such reasons. The co-existence of large numbers of nuclear and joint households suggests there are tensions that arise in such households which if they reach a certain point can only be solved by dissolution of the household.

Throughout the thesis an argument will be that when a new bride comes to a household she is ambiguous for she represents both the continuance of the household through her own recruitment to it and her ability to bear children; yet because her arrival marks the passing of time and the adulthood of her spouse she forshadows the fragmentation of the household and the death of some of its members.

It can be seen from the table that joint households are of two types - either they contain parents and their adult children or they contain a brother who is married and a brother who has yet to be married. There are no households that comprise simply adult brothers and their children (Kolenda's collateral type family). This would indicate that the presence of a parent (albeit a widowed parent) or the presence of a brother whose marriage must be paid for out of joint funds is necessary to hold the household together. Fraternal solidarity is not enough. This provides more evidence that a marriage may be a potential focal point for the dissolution of the household. Informants comment that households most commonly dissolve when members of the older generation die or the wife of the youngest brother comes to live in the household.

The terminology used in the table is taken from Kolenda (1967) so that the family types represented here can be compared with types found in other areas in India. In her paper, Kolenda argues that 'nuclear families develop where the wife has high bargaining power institutionalised in such cultural practices as a wife's right to legal divorce, bride price, negotiation of marriage, economic and social support to a couple from a wife's natal family or lineage. The tabulation of various factors indicates that where the bargaining power factors favouring the wife appear, there is a low proportion of residential joint families; where they do not appear there is a high proportion of joint families' (Kolenda 1967: 216). Kolenda reaches this conclusion by comparing the

proportions of joint and nuclear households in six areas in India. Interestingly her analysis of Mayer's Malwa data shows that 41% of all households in his survey were either joint or supplemented nuclear households, which places the women he studied midway along a range of bargaining powers. (At one extreme in UP, 74% of households were joint or supplemented nuclear and women had few institutionalised bargaining powers, while in Madras only 8% of families were joint or supplemented nuclear). My own data show that 44.5% of households were joint or supplemented nuclear suggesting that the Malwa women I studied can also be placed midway along a continuum of bargaining powers. This suggests that women do have some power to disrupt a joint family.

Men and women emphasise that women should never be independent of men and this is also reflected in the household composition. Of 50 widows living in the village, 38 live in some kind of extended household with an adult male present and only four live completely alone, and eight live with children or grandchildren without any adult male support. Although in theory a woman should never live without the support of a man, twelve of the widows in Ambakhedi did showing that women can be independent if necessary. Again this shows that women have certain bargaining powers and may challenge accepted norms. This may be one reason why their ritual states so often involve symbols about them being dangerous. In addition to the twelve widows living without adult men, two women live alone having left husbands in other villages to come and live in Ambakhedi. The two women concerned are the subject of constant gossip and criticism by the rest of the village because such independence is seen as undesirable. That it is possible shows that women can lead lives contrary to those propounded in the dominant model.

FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

The biggest contrast in the kinds of family relationships a woman has is in the contrast between those in her natal household and those in her conjugal household. Nowhere is this more obvious than in the differences in veiling practices she is expected to observe in the two different households. A woman only veils in her husband's home before his relatives and never in her natal home before her natal kin or before her own natal relatives outside her own home. In her conjugal home a woman must absent herself or cover her face with the end of her sari in the presence of her husband's senior male agnates and also in the presence of certain male affines. She most particularly avoids revealing her face or talking to her father-in-law, husband's elder brother and in public, her husband. She must also veil before her own son-in-law. In effect this means that a girl coming to her husband's village must veil before all men in the village who are older than her husband. This is because all older villagers whether actually related to her husband or not are classified as his senior relatives. Thus a young bride has to be extremely circumspect in her behaviour in her new household and ideally should remain as quiet and unobtrusive as possible. It is only when she has been a member of the household some time and mother to the children in the household and fewer of her husband's senior relatives are alive, that she can become more free in her behaviour.

By contrast, as a daughter of the house she is not subject to these kind of veiling restrictions and is freer to voice opinions and to move where she wants. While a new daughter-in-law will be expected to work hard, a young girl, although expected to give some help in the natal home, will be let off doing the more arduous tasks because eventually she will leave her natal home and it is envisaged that life in her conjugal home will be more arduous. The whole atmosphere in a woman's natal home, is more relaxed and less restrictive,

which makes the contrast between a woman's life in her conjugal home and that in her natal home more marked. This relaxation of restrictions applies to adult women as equally as children.

Discussions of this particular kind of veiling practice and its implications have been held elsewhere (see Sharma 1978 and Jacobson 1970). As Sharma points out, veiling is not basically concerned with making women sexually inaccessible to men but is about marking and preserving boundaries between kin groups. In her natal family, the woman is always in some ways like a guest: she has only limited right in the property. Since she is not married to a man with an existing claim to property, she does not present a threat of dissolution or of removing resources from it. Her position in her conjugal family is more ambiguous. As Jacobson comments 'Affinally linked patrilines have divergent interests in many respects and the possibility of conflict exists. Purdah (the word Jacobson uses to describe veiling) appears to be a distancing technique through which such conflict is avoided (Jacobson 1970: 19). Thus as a woman becomes older and has children her interests in her husband's household and khandan become stronger. As we have seen, the passing of the generations means that she has less need to veil. This gradual lessening of the need for circumspection marks a woman's gradual absorbtion into her husband's group at the same time defining her place within that group. I shall return to this point in the discussion of the changes that take place when a woman becomes a mother (see Chapter 6).

The rules governing a woman's relations in her natal household are relatively uncomplicated and tension free. In the conjugal household, not only are a woman's relations with men marked by restraint and formality but the only person to whom she may show her face and be more relaxed with is her husband's younger brother (devar). She is said to be in a similar position to his mother and indeed if his mother is dead or a widow will often act as 'mother' at a wedding. A woman's relation with other women of her husband's household are

often marked by tension and this is particularly true in the case of a women's relations with her mother-in-law. A woman is supposed to show respect and 'listen' to her mother-in-law but the relationship if often characterised by antagonism and disputes. The problems of the mother-in-law, daughter-in-law relations are often the subject of female songs. In contrast naming taboos means that a woman will only refer obliquely to her husband and will be loathe to describe the quarrels with him. She will not show this reticence about quarrels with her mother-in-law which has the effect of making quarrels between women somewhat more obvious than those between women and men. It is difficult to explain briefly all the causes of tensions in this relationship but they stem from the bride's transition from favoured daughter-in-law to less favoured daughter-in-law; and from the fact that the son who gives his mother a defined role in the household even more than her husband does (see Chapter 6) now has an interest in another woman and this means the mother-in-law may well feel she is losing her, or will eventually lose her position of authority. Widows for whom the son is the only male member of the household over whom they have a particular influence, feel this competition between daughter-in-law and themselves particularly keenly. (The four widows who live alone are bitter about their daughters-in-law who live with their husbands in the village but at one time shared households with the widows).

A woman's relations with her husband's brother's wives vary according to the personalities of and relations between the brothers in the family. In theory a woman should show more respect to her husband's elder brothers' wives but not to his younger brothers' wives. However, the difference in behaviour is not always very marked. Quarrels arise over the allocation of household tasks and resources and these quarrels may or may not escalate into more serious disputes. Relations between wives of brothers are not as tense as those between a woman and her mother-in-law because these women

do not challenge each other's position in the way that a woman challenges her mother-in-law's.

A woman's relations with her husband's sister are not easy to classify. On the one hand many women feel resentful of the leisure and privileges accorded a husband's sister when she returns home for a visit, especially since she may criticise the way the brother's wife performs certain household tasks. On the other hand this woman is only in the conjugal home as a visitor and so the kind of tensions which arise with women who are there more frequently do not have a chance to develop.

To sum up as a daughter and sister then a woman's relations are characterised by ties of affection (cf. Sharma, U. 1978: 266). As a daughter-in-law and wife she has to show respect and circumspection for all men older than herself including her husband and her relations with other women are coloured by the fact that women of the household owe their membership of the group to men and compete for the help of men within the household to determine what they want and need. Life in the conjugal home is more competitive.

A woman is expected to be faithful to her husband and to obey him and respect his opinion. The deference she must show him in public is an outward mark of this. Early years of marriage, particularly if spent in a joint family mean that a wife may have little opportunity to get to know or influence her husband but as she becomes more established and the birth of children together with the proof of her good conduct make remarriage less likely[23] she begins to have more influence over her husband. Her assumption of many economic tasks and management of the household give her added authority and if she lives in a nuclear family, she will have more opportunity to see her husband on her own. The result is that although all women pay lip service to their husband's ultimate authority many have more influence than they might publicly admit.

A woman's ties with her own kin remain closest while her brothers and parents are alive. Visits home help to maintain these ties and at many of the life-cycle rites to be described in the following chapters a woman's brother or other members of her natal kin have particular duties.[24] However, as the generations pass a woman's ties with her natal home begin to weaken, especially when members of her own generation begin to die. Older women in the village when asked where their natal home was would often comment, 'I have no maika, there is nobody left'. They do not give children to their natal households and therefore do not seem to have the same kind of enduring links with it as they do with their conjugal households.

More could be said about family relations but this brief description gives something of the flavour of the relationships that are most important in the lives of women. Further background can be found in the works of writers such as Mayer (1973).

CONCLUSION

Ambakhedi is a rural community where the main occupations are agricultural. Relationships within the community are structured by the principles of purity and pollution which regulate the caste system and a kinship system common to much of north and central India. Women play a full part in the economic activity of the village but own little property, and have no formal political role. Therefore their interest in these matters tends to be mediated through the interests of men whom they are related by marriage or birth. Women's lives centre on the households (both natal and conjugal) to which they belong. They have less contact with the city than men but marriage networks link them to numerous other villages in the region. Compared with castes and political groupings women cannot be considered as an organised group with any formal vocalisation of their interests. Kin

ties seem to divide them further among themselves and quarrels between women are publicly discussed while taboos conceal quarrels between men and women. Thus it seems that at the level of observed behaviour as well as ritual symbols, for a women to maintain her interest in the status quo of the community she must identify her interests with that of a man.

In daily life women are not physically separated from men in a way which might promote a strong sense of the women's world being separate from men's. They express their relations with different categories of men by complicated veiling restrictions. In addition women are encouraged to express a sense of sarm (shame) and avoid placing themselves in situations where they might be supposed to be sexually unfaithful or assaulted. The emphasis is on the individual woman distancing herself from categories of men rather than male and female worlds being kept separate. It is possible that this particular pattern of interaction between the sexes is more likely to encourage women to identify their interest with men than one where they are more obviously separated from the men's world. - In addition this trend is encouraged by the fact that socially or physically isolated women are seen to be in danger of physical and/or verbal attack.

In the chapters that follow the rituals of the life cycle will be examined and it will be suggested that the symbolism expresses the importance of female power, the high status of certain aspects of it, and the low status of others and the different ritual states associated with the various female roles in the kinship system. It will be argued that this can be understood in terms of the ideology which underlies the relations in the community of Ambakhedi and other villages like it. Thus the description of Ambakhedi's social and economic organisation sets the scene for understanding how women's relation to the 'moral community' is symbolised in ritual.

NOTES

1. cf. Sharma 1978: 278.

2. Women's movements are restricted by certain ideas about female modesty and female sexuality. A woman is seen as safe from sexual assault (and/or temptation) when she is in the company of men who are classified as her brothers of members of her father's generation since sexual assault or relationships with these men are thought of as unthinkable. In all other situations, a woman is regarded as vulnerable. She avoids the dangers by avoiding isolated places and by her demeanour. It is important that she should show sarm (shame/modesty) at all times, particularly in her eyes. Women's fear and dislike of living by the wells is related to these norms and they are not just unfounded fears. During the twelve months of my stay at least two cases of sexual assault occurred. Both took place on women who were in their conjugal rather than their natal village and were therefore at risk from men who were not classified as fathers or brothers and both took place when women were walking through the 'jungle' on their own, ie. through paths in the deserted fields that led out to the households situated near wells.

3. Sharma describes similar segregation between male and female space in a village in Himachal Pradesh in more detail in an article. She also adds that '...there is a disproportionate responsibility on the part of women to avoid men in areas defined as public space. Within the household this assymetry is less pronounced and men and women maintain a distance from each other by means of tact, silence and discretion' (Sharma 1978: 268). The comments could be applied to the behaviour of women in Ambakhedi.

4. Sharma writes '...there is some anthropological evidence that the actual or symbolic separation of the sexes in social life does not necessarily indicate a hierarchical relationship. Mary Douglas points out that the rules concerning pollution which segregate menstruating women among the Lele may be manipulated by men to control women, but they may also be manipulated by women to control either sex (Douglas 1975). Even where segregation clearly places power in the hands of men, there may not be a predictable relationship between the stringency with which the segregation is enforced and the

actual loss of power by women. For instance, data on Muslim women suggest that even where segregation is very strictly enforced and where women are virtually invisible in public life, they are nevertheless not forced into total economic and political passivity (Maher 1976). Their segregation may even create a sense of solidarity among women insofar as the enforced realization of the common situation provides the basis for co-operation and mutual support' (Sharma 1978: 259-60). Thus although different categories of men and women do have more chance to interact than in other cultures, this does not necessarily mean their 'status' is higher than in areas where women are more secluded.

5. The Nimar district is to the south as can be seen from Fig. 3. It can be said to begin with the Vindhyan hills. As the country becomes more rugged and hilly, in the regions approaching these hills, the Ambakhedi villagers tend to refer to the district as Nimar even though technically it is still Malwa.

6. Mayer notes the worship of these two deities in other villages in the region (Mayer 1973: 193). Sati Mata is a memorial to a woman who immolates herself (sati) on the funeral pyre of her husband, which is worshipped as a goddess. Paliya is a memorial to a man who died a violent death and is also worshipped as a god.

7. I have been unable to find out very much information about this subcaste. Mayer writes as follows about a comparable group in a Malwa village where he studied: 'In addition, a group of Rajputs live in some twelve villages of the region. There are called Pancholi Rajputs, are endogamous and commensally quite separate from all others. They are said to have been put out of the caste, but the date on which this was done and the crime over which such drastic action was taken are both indefinite. The caste genealogist is said to know the details, but such information is jealously guarded. It could only be divulged at a general caste council, called to decide whether to readmit the Pancholis'. (Mayer 1973: 155). However I could find no evidence for the origin of the Puriya Rajputs of Ambakhedi being of this type.

8. The Trust conducts training courses for village level workers, midwives, preschool teachers and many other jobs connected with village social and development work. A few trainees conduct some of their fieldwork exercises in Ambakhedi. It also acts as a source of information for villagers as to the kind of improvements in sanitation and agriculture that villagers themselves can implement. There is a school up to college level to which some of the children of Ambakhedi are sent. Most important for women, there is a small cottage hospital staffed only by women where some of the women of the village go for their deliveries. It was through the offices of the trust and more particularly the staff and principal of the Family and Child Welfare Training Centre that I obtained my introduction to the village.

9. I owe this insight to Henry Banard who worked in a village which was some five or six miles south, ie. five or six miles further from Indore. The villagers in this village had organised a daily truck service to Indore.

10. In regional terms this makes the village middle sized. The 1971 census data from the Indore division of Madhya Pradesh indicates that out of a total of 12000 villages, 3000 fall between the 500 and 2000 population mark.

11. Statistics available at the Indore statistical office indicate that the total land cultivable has increased from 452 acres in 1971 to 681 acres in 1978. This has been at the expense of the decreased availability of grazing land. During the Emergency 23 men (mainly Jatav but also the Bhilala, a Koli and some Balai) who were classified as Harijans received 'gifts' of land of $1\frac{1}{2}$ acres each from the government. Much of this land had formerly been left free for the grazing of village cattle. The statistical office also indicates that between 1971 and 1978 the number of cattle owned by the village increased from 650 to 1329. This has led to many disputes over the grazing land that still remains available.

12. There is no space here to discuss fully family planning techniques used in the village. During fieldwork, time limited my own enquiries. Moreover, the topic was sensitive since 23 men had undergone compulsory sterilisation during the Emergency. However, extensive interviews with a number of women and some men indicated the following trends. Firstly birth control was used to limit families rather than plan them so that when a family had had the maximum number of children it could afford, then some kind of action was taken to limit fertility. In general the preferred method was female sterilisation. Pills were considered dangerous, other methods inconvenient and vasectomy was thought to sap male strength. Most women of the younger generation, ie. those with three or fewer children were in favour of some kind of birth control while women of the older generation were more doubtful about it, arguing that it gave women freedom from their fear of the consequences of sexual misdemeanour and would make them less likely to obey their husbands and other members of their conjugal family. There was an increasing trend for women to have the 'operation' usually with the consent of their husband. All those who had it had rationalised it in terms of what their resources could provide for the children and secondly for the benefits it brought to women's health which most women recognised as deteriorating rapidly after their third or fourth pregnancy. However, the over-riding consideration was not female health but being able to provide for the children. In this context, parents often mentioned that there was no way additional land could be cultivated and there were difficulties in getting any job in the city.

13. There seems to have been an increasing effort on the part of the Balai to improve their status vis-a-vis the rest of the village by giving up certain practices which they feel the rest of the village regards as low. This includes their traditional custom of collecting wood for the cremation pyre. There is some pressure also within the caste for the women to give up midwifery and some families have given it up for this reason. However, the remaining Balai midwives continue their traditional occupation because of payments of cash and grain they receive, because they enjoy the work and because most of them admit to a feeling of satisfaction in being admitted into high caste homes where they are not normally allowed.

14. Mayer writes about the Bhilalas as follows: 'Again the Bhilalas stem from alliances of Rajputs with Bhil (tribal) women. Since these unions were informal the issue were not recognized as Rajputs. Neither were they accepted as Bhils, however, and the Bhilalas nowadays disclaim any connection with them, though others may call them a subcaste of the Bhil tribe' (Mayer 1973: 154).

15. This was brought home to me sharply on one occasion when I ventured to make a comment to a group of men about political life within the village. It was met with the retort - 'What do you know about politics, you are studying women?'!

16. Harijan literally 'meaning children of god' is the name Gandhi gave to untouchable castes in an attempt to improve their status. In official language untouchables are sometimes referred to as 'Harijans', or increasingly often 'scheduled castes'.

17. This account of the kinship system gives only the main outlines of the features which seem most closely related to the subject under study; for a more detailed account, see Mayer 1973.

18. For a detailed discussion of the significance of clan names, see Mayer 1973: 55.

19. Mayer seems to be suggesting a similar pattern. He writes: 'The conjectures into which one is forced if one wishes to discuss such structural features of the clan emphasise the essentially local and genealogically shallow interest of the villagers about their clans. These mainly provide affiliations which are invoked in the rules of exogamy and of ritual acts performed by the small local clan group only. The entire clan does not meet as a group (it is far too dispersed for that) and there are few clans whose members are distinguished in any way' (Mayer 1973: 163).

20. See Jacobson 1977 for a more detailed discussion of this aspect of residential flexibility in the kinship system.

21. Mayer writes 'In areas further north, the village is not only exogamous, but no marriage is allowed into those settlements with common boundaries. In the south on the other hand, intra village matches are quite normal. Malwa occupies a position socially as well as geographically between these two poles. Marriage within the village is allowed but it is uncommon and not very well regarded' (Mayer 1973: 209).

22. Members of other castes sometimes criticise the tendency among the Rajputs. On one occasion a low caste informant said critically 'Oh Rajputs, they only look at mother's milk and father's urine!' indicating the tendency to 'forget' certain relations.

23. Nãthrã: second marriage is allowed for both men and women, although most say it should be avoided where possible. If a woman proves barren, particularly slatternly, or unfaithful most informants considered that a man was justified in taking a second wife. In most cases the first wife would leave. A wife is considered justified in leaving her husband if he beats her excessively. Couples also separate because of personal incompatibility or affairs with other people but these reasons are not as socially acceptable as the other reasons.

24. I have not gone into detail here about the relations between groups of affines since these relations will become clearer as the thesis progresses and they have been dealt with in detail by Mayer (1973: 225f.)

Fig. 1 Location of Malwa Region (hatched area)

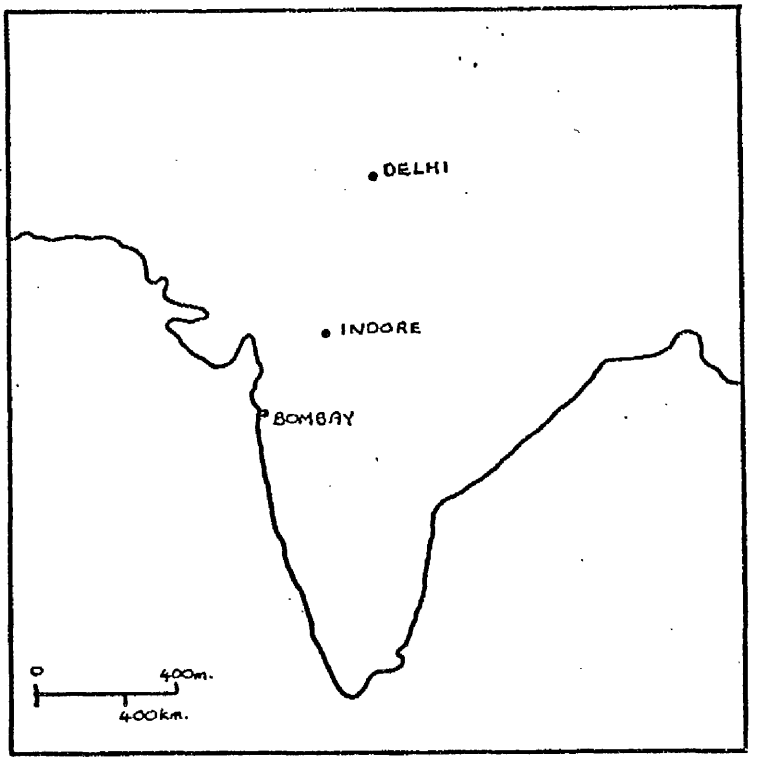


Fig. 2 Location of Indore

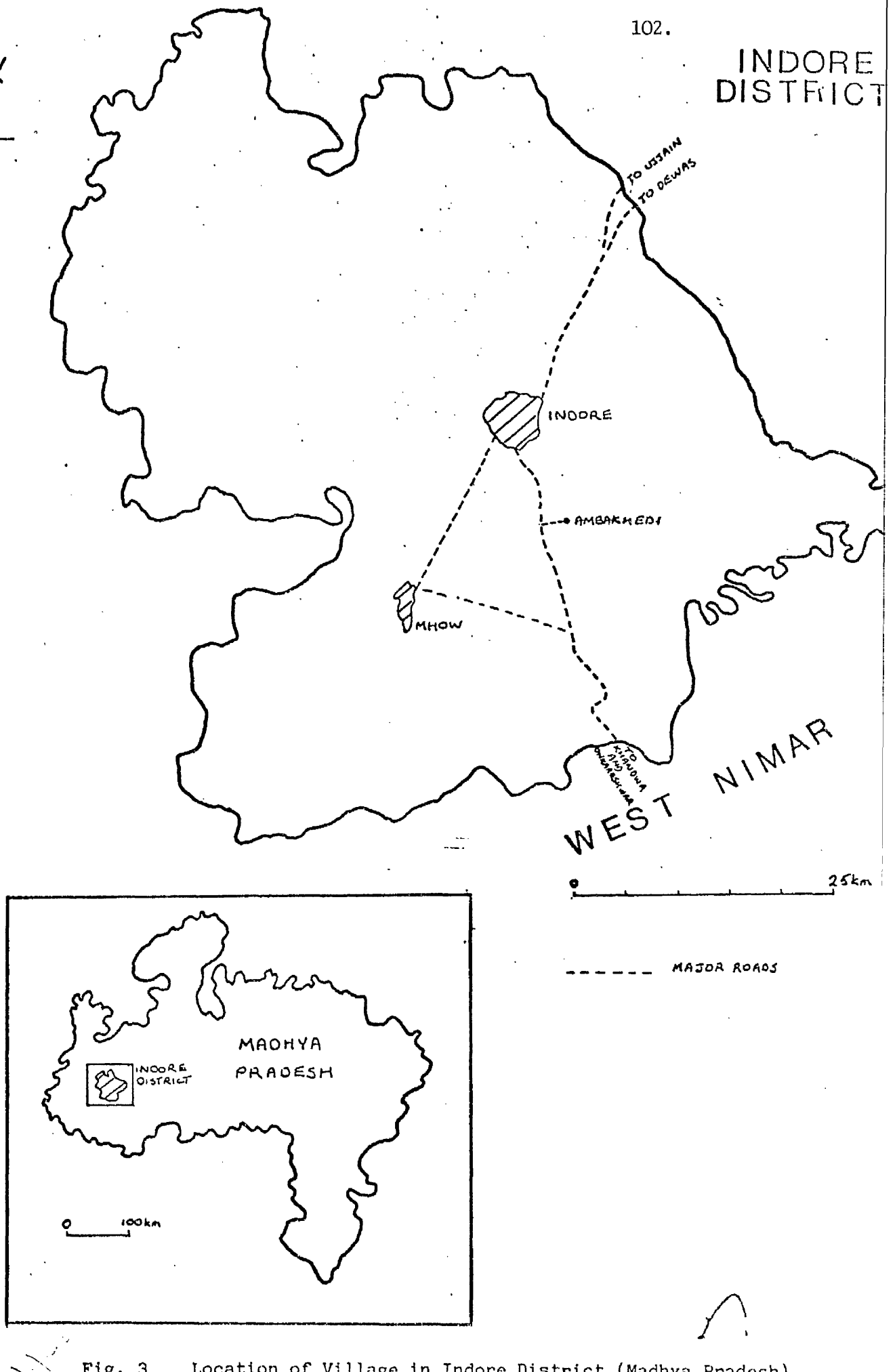
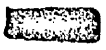


Fig. 3 Location of Village in Indore District (Madhya Pradesh)

KEY (Figure 4.)

Houses



Temple

Major Shrine

Well

Wall of Irrigation Tank

Road

A — Area inhabited by non Harijans

B — Area inhabited by Jatav

C — Area inhabited by Balai

D — Area inhabited by both Harijans and non Harijans - Hanuman settlement

Area Boundary

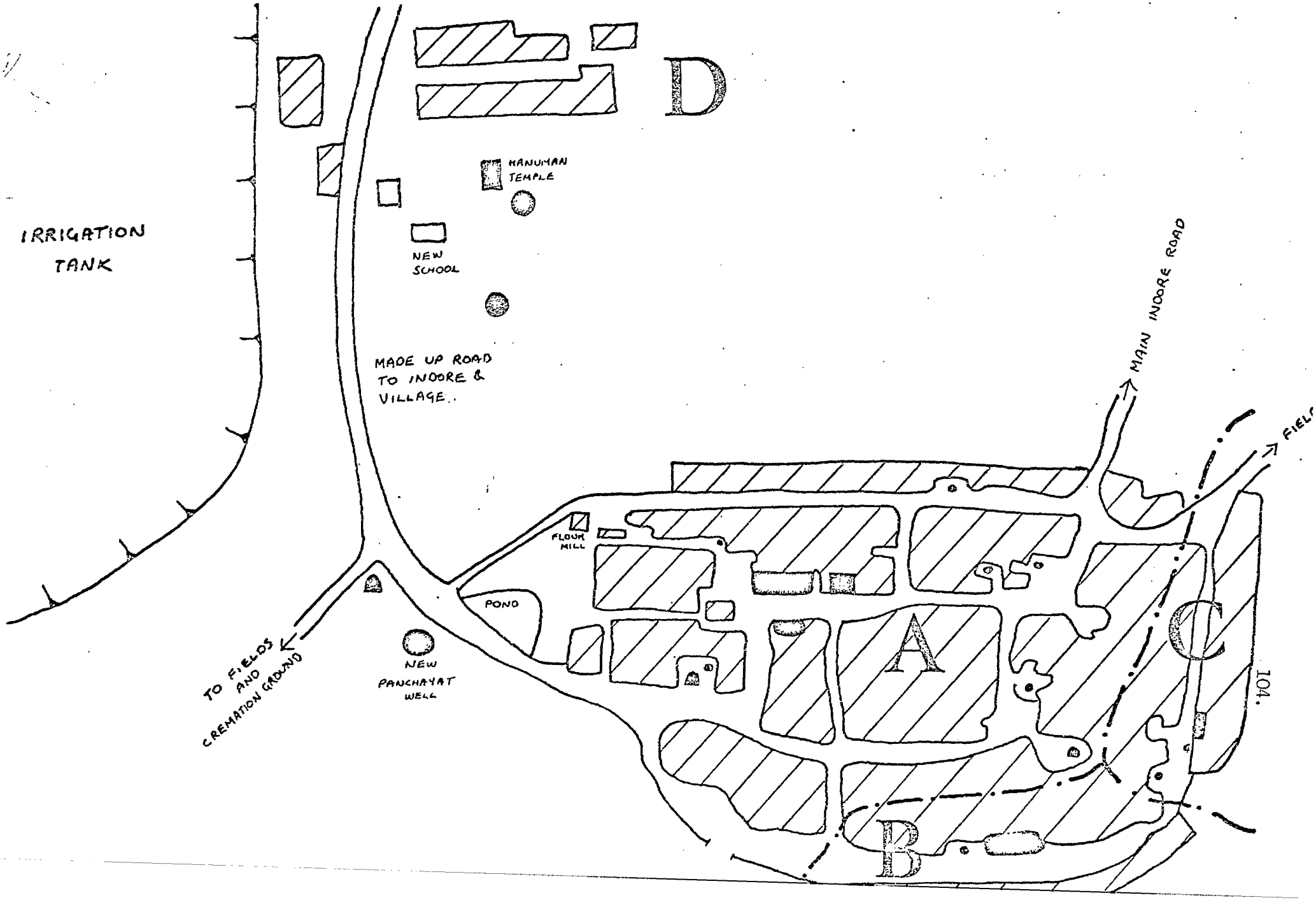
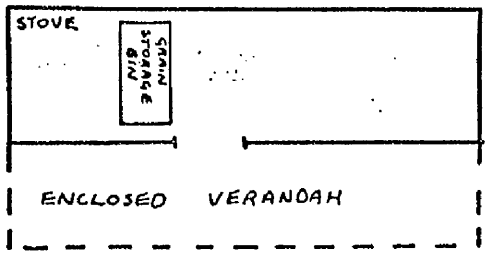


Fig. 4 Map of Village (not to scale)

1.



2.

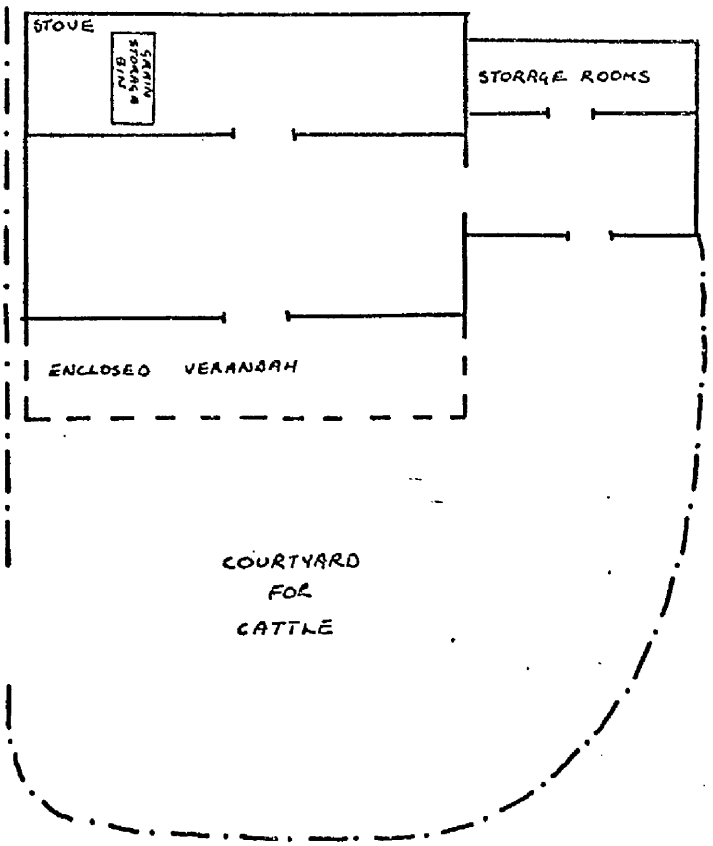
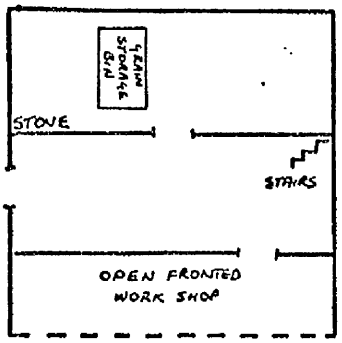


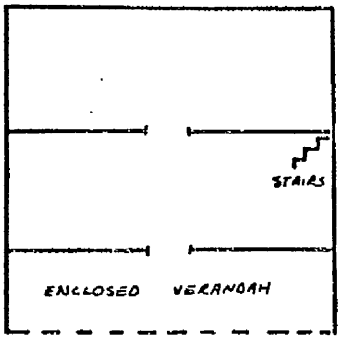
Fig. 5 House Plans 1. Simple Type (Untouchable agricultural labourer's house)

2. Rajput Farmer's House

(not to scale)



GROUND FLOOR



3.

UPPER FLOOR

Fig. 5 (continued) 3. Two Storeyed Mud House (Tailor's house)
(not to scale)

Table 1

Year	Occupied Households	Population	Men	Women
1961[1]	125	846	426	419
1971[2]	164	1083	571	512
1979[3]	214	1400	757	643

Sources:

1. District Census Handbook Indore 1961.
2. District Census Handbook Indore 1971.
3. My own Census conducted during fieldwork.

Table to show Expansion in Ambakhedi's Population between 1961 and 1979.

Table 2

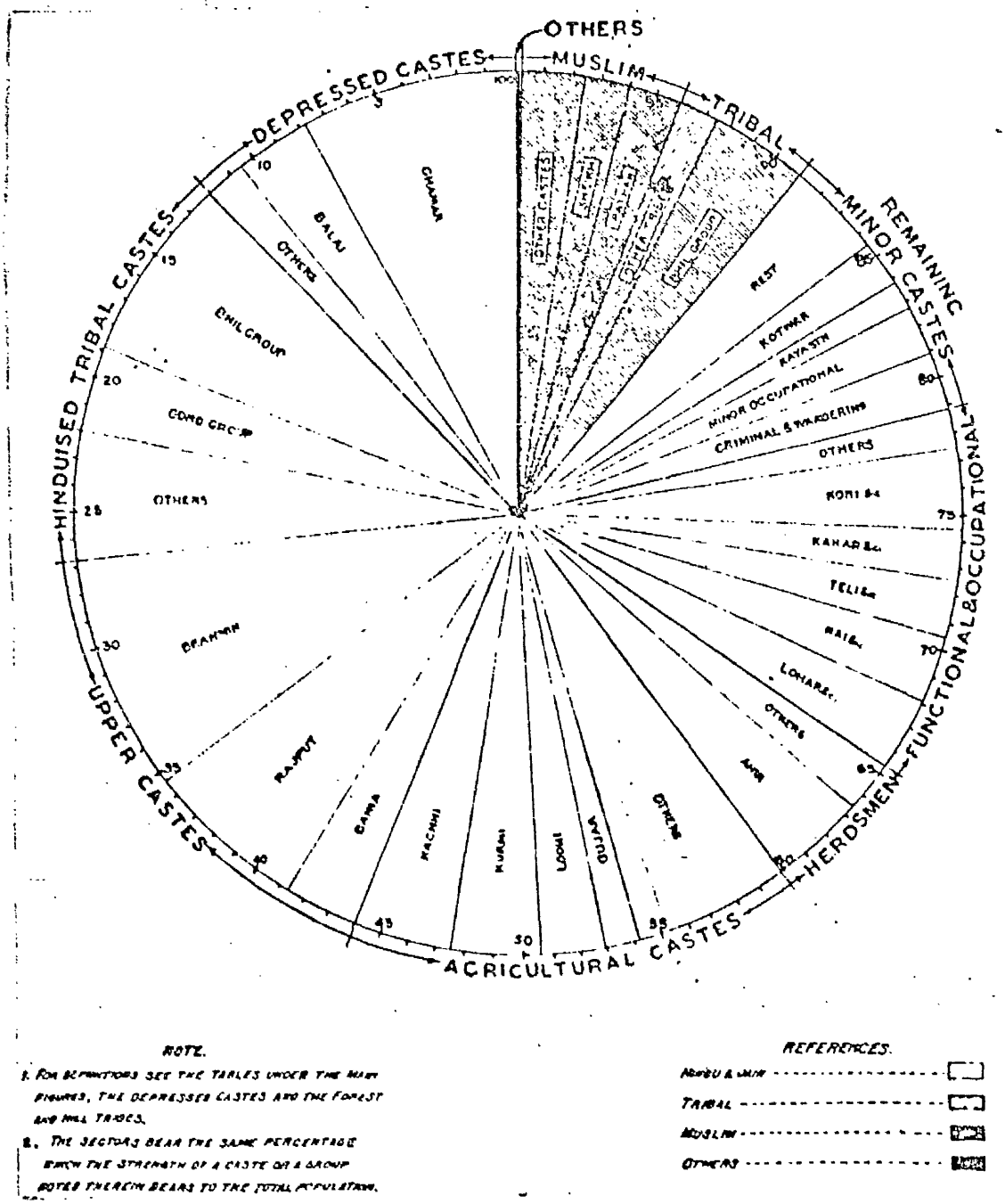
Caste Name	Traditional Occupation	Population	% of Total
Purviya Rajput		381	27
Jatav	Leather Worker	241	17
Gari	Goatherd	201	14
Malwi Balai	Weaver	194	14
Bhilala		95	7
Teli Sahu	Oilpresser	67	5
Rajput Thakur		37	3
Gujarati Lohar	Ironsmith	36	3
Malwi Camar	Leather Worker	31	2
Darzi Parmar	Tailor	28	2
Lodhi Gosal	Grass Cutter	25	2
Nimar Brahman		17	1
Rajput Yadav		13	0.9
Nai	Barber	12	0.8
Sunnar	Goldsmith	8	0.5
Khunbi		7	0.5
Koli		6	0.4
Brahman		1	0.1
	TOTAL	1400	100.2 *

* approximation due to rounding errors.

Table to show Caste Composition of Ambakhedi.

Table 3

DIAGRAM SHOWING THE PROPORTIONATE DISTRIBUTION OF THE MAIN CASTES AND CLASSES IN CENTRAL INDIA.



The diagram above is taken from the 1931 census (opp 231). It covers an area which extends beyond Malwa including much of what is now eastern Madhya Pradesh. It is useful for putting the caste composition of Ambakhedi in its regional context.

Table 4

Caste Hierarchy		
Division 1	Brahman (Subcastes A and B)	High Caste
Division 2	Rajput Subcastes: Purviya, Yadav, Thakur	
Division 3	Gari, Darzi, Lohar, Nai Lodhi, Khunbi, Teli, Sunnar Koli Below this line castes are classified as untouchable	Middle Caste
Division 4	Balai, Jatav Camar	Low Caste
Division 5	Bhilila	

This table shows the way in which castes in the village are ranked according to the commensal hierarchy. In general castes on higher lines will not take kacca food from castes below them. They may or may not take kacca food from castes in the same level. This is a very simplistic version of the caste hierarchy adapted from the more compled kind of analysis undertaken by Mayer (see 1973: 36f.). Spaces precludes a more detailed analysis and the broad outline of the hierarchy attempted here is sufficient for the discussion in the chapter.

Table 5

Crop	Period of Ploughing	Period of Planting	Harvesting
Maize	Late May	Late June (after rain begins)	October-November
Rice	Late May	Late June (after rain begins)	October
Millet	Late May	Late June (after rain begins)	December-January
Lentils	Late May	Late June (after rain begins)	January
Soya Bean	Late May	Late June (after rain begins)	October
Cotton	Late May	Late June (after rain begins)	October
Groundnuts	Late May	Late June (after rain begins)	October
Potatoes	September	October	January
Sugar Cane	February	March	September-December
Wheat	November	December	April

Chart to show Main Periods of Agricultural Activity in Ambakhedi according to crop.

Table 6

Caste	Number of Marriages Analysed	Number of Villages
Balai	49	39
Gari	44	27
Jatav	43	26
Purviya Rajput	74	13
Lohar	10	10
Teli	12	8
Lodhi	6	5
Rajput Thakur	6	5
Darzi	6	5
Nai	3	1
Koli	2	1
Brahman	3	3
Total	258	143

This table includes the twelve castes where it was possible to obtain reliable data for nearly all the married women within the village subcaste population. Six castes have been omitted on the grounds that information obtained from these castes was either unobtainable or unreliable.

Table to show Number of Villages into which Castes Contract Marriages.

Table 7

Household Type	No. of Households	% of Households	No. of People	% of People
Single Person Household	7	3.5	7	0.5
Nuclear family: a couple and their unmarried children	84	41.5	445	34
Sub-nuclear family: a fragment of a former nuclear family, eg. a widowed or divorced parent with unmarried children	6	3	14	1
Supplemented sub-nuclear family: a sub-nuclear family plus some other unmarried widowed or divorced relative(s) who were not part of the original nuclear family	3	1.5	16	1
Supplemented nuclear family: a nuclear family plus some other widowed, divorced or unmarried relative(s) such as the husband's widowed mother or his unmarried brother or sister	30	15	188	14.5
Lineal joint family: parents with unmarried children plus one married son and his wife and unmarried children	47	23	434	33.5
Supplemented lineal joint family: parents with unmarried children plus one married son and his wife and unmarried children plus some other relative(s) who is/are not (a) member(s) of any of the nuclear families	2	1	15	1
Supplemented collateral joint family: two or more married brothers with their wives and unmarried or divorced relative(s) such as the widowed mother, widower father, unmarried brothers or sisters. (NB, there are no collateral joint families in Ambakhedi)	9	4.5	118	9
Supplemented lineal collateral family: parents, their unmarried children plus two or more married sons with their wives, married and unmarried children plus some other relative(s) who is (are) not (a) member(s) of any of the nuclear families	2	1	29	2
Other types not covered by Kolenda's categories	13	6.5	31	2
TOTAL	203	100.5*	1297	98.5*

* Approximations in percentage totals are due to errors caused during rounding.

Table to show Household Types in Ambakhedi (Terminology taken from Kolenda 1967: 149-50)

CHAPTER 3

THE RITUAL STATE OF A KUMĀRĪ

This chapter attempts to look at the significance of the ritual state of an unmarried girl in three ways. First the ritual state of an unmarried girl is compared and contrasted with that of married women in order to demonstrate its distinctive nature. Secondly its significance for understanding the ritual state of adult married women is explored by looking more closely at the two events, marriage and menarche, which mark an end of this state and discussing how these can be seen as giving adult women a defined position with regard to the 'moral community'. Thirdly implications of what this conveys about the relative status of physical and social sexuality are considered.

THE STATUS OF KUMARI

An unmarried girl is known as a kumārī (literally unmarried virgin) or sometimes more formally as kanyā kumārī, the latter expression being associated with the phrase kanya dan (the gift of a maiden) which refers to the gift that a father makes of his daughter in marriage.[1] A kumari's distinctive ritual state seems to have three aspects:

(1) She is not associated with the impurity of adult women;
(2) She is the object of special respect and worship;
(3) Her role in rituals is distinct from that of young boys as well as that of adult women, and reflects her femaleness, her limited ties with her natal household, and her auspiciousness.

To understand the implications of a kumari's special state it is useful to consider these three aspects separately.

(1) The purity of a kumari: In Hinduism in general it is a commonplace that women as a group are ritually more polluting than men. Manu unequivocally equates women and śūdras (Thapar 1975: 9). However in Ambakhedi many men and women did not believe that women were more polluting than men at all times. They argued that women were only polluting on the specific occasions of menstruation and childbirth. Those villagers who maintained that women were less pure than men at all times also associated the root of female impurity with childbirth and pollution. Since in both cases the impurity of women is linked to powers associated with their physical maturity it seems to explain why a girl is not associated with impurity before she reaches this stage.

A kumari is kept away from the pollution associated with mature women. Many women consider it improper to use their old clothes for the clothing or bedding of a kumari. (Old saris and skirts are commonly torn up to make quilts). They argue that a grown woman may well have obtained such clothes with menstrual blood and secretions. Since such blood and secretions are considered polluting, the clothes are considered too 'dirty' (gandā)[2] to come into contact with a kumari. Most women do not feel that other grown women will become polluted if they touch such clothes or even if they touch others while menstruating. Moreover some mothers take the precaution of dressing their small daughters in synthetic or synthetic and cotton cloth if they themselves are menstruating. This cloth is defined as pakka and therefore transmits pollution less easily than clothes made from natural material alone which is defined as kacca.[3] The idea behind this is that a small girl should be protected from the menstrual pollution of her mother. In general menstruating women will avoid touching small girls. This special purity of a kumari ends at menarche.

(2) Honour paid to kumari: A kumari is also singled out in other ways. It is considered a work of religious merit (punya)[4] to make formal gifts to her. Some families regularly make offerings of food to a group of nine kumari[5] at the larger festivals. Giving to a kumari is seen as a selfless act comparable to making a gift to a beggar or a Brahman. One woman even compared the giving of gifts to a kumari to offerings of clothes that friends and relatives put on a corpse. In both cases she argued the recipient was leaving the village. The kumari would leave for her husband's home at marriage and the corpse would be burnt and leave the village to become an ancestor. In neither case would the donor have any thought of gaining a reward from the recipient. (The reward of spiritual merit is something different since it is granted by god and not by the recipient of the gift).

During the engagement ceremony held by the Rajput caste, it is customary for a small girl (not the girl whose engagement is taking place) to be dressed in red and seated next to the bride-to-be. She is said to be the god Ganesa (the elephant headed son of Śiva and Pārvati, especially associated with marriage) and offerings are placed in her lap in the same way that they would be placed in front of deities in the temple. Married women never represent deities in this way (although they may on occasion be honoured, see god bharāī ritual chapter 6). In this instance the kumari's special role seems both a function of her purity which lets her stand for a god and her status as an outsider which means that she can be the object of respect and gifts from her seniors.[6]

(3) A kumari's participation in rituals reflects both her unmarried status and her physical immaturity. It also marks her as undisputably female. The gifts and respect paid to a kumari seem, as described above, to reflect in part a kumari's temporary membership of her natal family. The nature of this membership also affects her participation in family

worship of the ancestors. While women who have married into the household, adult men and boys worship ancestors at Solah Sraddh (see Appendix 2) kumari do not. While ancestor worship is performed inside the house, the girls worship a figure of mud and flowers that they make themselves outside the house. The figure is known as Sanja Bai. She is never given an explicit identity but the songs the girls sing describe a girl leaving her parent's home for her conjugal home.[7] The contrast between the small girls worshipping a figure of a women outside the house and the adults and boys worshipping inside the house seems to speak for itself. After marriage the girls worship Sanja in their natal home for one last time and then when the Naumi festival (the nine days devoted to the worship of the gotra goddess) begins, they worship their husband's gotra goddess for the first time. The following year they cease to perform Sunja puja and from then on worship their husband's ancestors during Solah Sraddh. The rituals reflect the limited nature of a girl's ties with her natal gotra and her incorporation into her husband's household.

Marriage changes more than a woman's membership of households. In chapter 5 and subsequent chapters the ritual powers women acquire at marriage will be described. The most obvious of these powers are those that allow married women to perform rituals at the weddings of others. As suggested in the introduction this allows them to take part in the metabirth of the bride and groom and thus in the creation of adult persona in the 'moral community'. A kumari is excluded from these kinds of rituals, on the grounds she is unmarried. Turmeric is especially important in these rituals and is associated with fertility and children (cf. Selwyn 1979: 684). Unlike physiological signs of physical fertility such as menstruation or sexual secretion, it is not impure but on the contrary is pure and auspicious. Nevertheless it is considered bad luck for a kumari to apply it or to have it

applied to herself. Thus a kumari's ritual domain is shaped not only by concepts of purity and impurity and membership of her natal kingroup but also by the fact that she does not have the powers women acquire at marriage.

Women's mature physical sexuality seems to be associated with danger. This will become evident in the discussions of the age of marriage in this chapter and in discussions of childbirth and menstruation in subsequent chapters. Kumari are not associated with such dangers. Certain ritual beliefs and practices seem to be based on the assumptions that the dangerous inauspicious aspects of the powers of mature women can be counterbalanced by the distinctively female yet 'safe' powers of a kumari. The most notable examples of this are the beliefs concerning witchcraft and rain producing magic.

In the event of a drought rain producing rituals are held. The women of the village, preferably led by the patel's wife gather together after dark and process noisily round the village. They should be as rowdy and dishevelled as possible. People described how previously certain women had dressed as men (although I did not observe this). The villagers say that rain will come if the antics of the women frighten the sleeping householders.

The rowdy behaviour of the women, a kind of demeanour not usually encouraged is essential for the performance of the ritual. Rain is needed to bring fertility to the crops. To bring fertility, women must indulge in behaviour that breaks normal rules and taboos and is frightening, if not threatening.[8] Later discussions will indicate that female physical sexuality itself is depicted as disruptive and threatening. Selwyn (1979) sees the rowdy behaviour of women in certain rituals as being associated with female fertility which is seen as 'hot' and disorderly.

Once the women have processed through the main part of the village, they visit the shrine of the god Hanuman on the outskirts (see Fig. 4, chapter 2), and there seated in

front of the shrine they sing devotional songs to the god. It is in the worship of Hanuman that the auspiciousness of a kumari's immaturity seems to be invoked. Just as rowdy behaviour is not usually encouraged in women so they are not usually encouraged to worship Hanuman. In this case however his powers are thought essential to produce rain.[9] Otherwise it is commonly believed that women who visit the temple or eat prasād offered to the god are trying to become dākin (witches). One belief runs that dākin gain their power from dancing naked with the god in the middle of the night. Others believe that dakin gain powers by going round the image of the god seven times in the way they circle the sacred fire seven times at their marriage. No explanation is given as to why Hanuman is associated with witchcraft except that he is unmarried.

In the rain producing ritual where worship of Hanuman takes place at night by women, certain precautions are taken. Women ask the men to offer the god a coconut. They will not eat the prasad of this offering. In addition a kumari is asked to rub the image of the god with cow dung (a pure substance) and this is left on the god until rain washes it off.[10] People say that a kumari can do this because she can approach the god without fear of becoming a witch. Her femaleness is significant because although a boy cannot become a witch, it is a kumari, not a small boy who must do this.

Thus the symbolism of the ritual suggests that female disorder and the god Hanuman can produce rain and hence agricultural fertility. However female disorder and Hanuman are associated with disruptive threatening powers in particular with witchcraft. A kumari, though female, is not associated with this kind of danger and seems to act as a symbol of auspicious unthreatening female power. I was never told specifically that a kumari could not be a witch but descriptions and stories about witches invariably made them

out to be mature women. Menstruation also seems to be associated with witchcraft in that on the first day of her period, a woman is said to be like a dakin.[11] Thus a kumari seems to be associated with femaleness but femaleness devoid of its inauspicious aspects as well as its impure connotations.

This pattern seems reflected in beliefs about hair. Although it is known that kumari cannot produce children, their hair is thought of as a cure for barreness. Barren women may try and cut a lock of a kumari's hair, burn it and drink the ashes. A kumari whose hair is cut in this way will become barren. There are no similar beliefs about the hair of boys and potency.[12] Thus kumari have distinctive female powers even although they cannot produce children. Interestingly, there are parallels to the hair cutting magic where barren women will burn soiled menstrual clothes of other women and drink the ashes (cf. Fuchs 1950: 270). However unlike the hair of a kumari these clothes are polluting and associated with danger (see chapter 4). Again this comparison of ritual beliefs suggests that although kumari have limited powers when compared to women they are auspicious and devoid of danger.

MARRIAGE AS SOCIAL MATURATION

These descriptions of a kumari's ritual state lead onto a more detailed consideration of the timing and events which associate women with different ritual domains, with pollution and with danger. Marriage associates women with a new ritual domain, and a new gotra. It also gives them defined position within the 'moral community'. The significance of marriage as a rite of social maturation can be seen in the beliefs and practices surrounding it.

Ideally all girls marry and to be unmarried and a grown woman is abnormal. In Ambakhedi there was only one woman who was unmarried and likely to remain so. She was a grossly deformed cripple unable to walk and although her

parents had tried to find her a match they had failed. She was in her midtwenties and her unmarried state was accepted as the unavoidable, although unfortunate outcome of her severe deformities. Other less handicapped girls had managed to find husbands even if they did not go to live with their husband's family. One deaf and dumb girl had had her marriage performed while she was very young (probably at about the age of six or seven) and the disability had not been too obvious. She had never gone to live with her in-laws but had remained with her family. Her family was generally considered to have done well for her and their deceit was not criticised, for it was argued her groom could marry again if he wished and at the same time she was not condemned to an unmarried state. The parents of another handicapped girl who was unable to talk and seemed half witted had also found a bridegroom for her. In this instance the bridegroom was a poor city man whose parents had died leaving him no money. The girl's parents had paid him a sum to induce him to marry the girl. Again the girl actually lived with her natal family. In this case too the action was approved of. The groom with the money given him had more chance of finding an acceptable wife than he would have done otherwise; and the girl had been married. There were also instances of sickly young girls who had been married in some haste since their parents feared that otherwise they would die before marriage.

Marriage is thus a necessary condition for adult women giving them a defined status within the 'moral community'. It is also necessary for men (cf. Mayer 1973: 227). Few castes in Ambakhedi performed the upanayan (initiation) ritual for men, and where they did, marriage seemed to be given greater significance. The ritual elaboration of marriage suggested that it was seen as the major rite of social maturation for men too. Beliefs about the fate of men and women who die before marriage reflected this.

There were no unmarried adults in the village apart from those described above.[13] Many villagers believe that if a person dies before marriage then that person should be buried and not cremated.[14] Small children are always buried as are sannyasi (renouncers). These are both categories of individuals who are not fully integrated into normal social life. The implication of this belief is that older unmarried men and women are also not completely integrated into normal social life. Unless integrated, young adults who die do not pass into the world of pitr (ancestors), but remain in a limbo-like state among the world of spirits. There is a feeling that they may return as spirits (bhūt) to trouble their families. During my study one instance of possession was interpreted as being caused by such a bhut. In this case the bhut caused a small boy to go into a trance at various stages during the marriage of an older brother. It was envy of the brother's marriage that brought about the appearance of the bhut according to the family concerned.

The social maturity a woman attains at marriage is not to be confused with social autonomy or independence. A woman is incorporated into the social persona of her husband through the marriage rituals. She is never regarded as independent.[15] A woman is only permitted to undergo marriage in the full form once, although it is accepted by most castes that she can perform a kind of secondary marriage known as nathra. (The Brahmans and Thakurs are the only castes who do not practise this form of secondary marriage). Men by contrast can marry with the full rites more than once. If a woman becomes a widow she must cease to wear suhāg, the collective term for the ornaments and decoration of a married women with a living husband. (These ornaments include toerings, red bangles, vermillion in the hair etc.).[16] Her right to suhag as a sign of her social status depends upon the existence of her husband. If a man loses a wife

and then remarries, then his second wife must wear a small medal known as a sok (literally co-wife). The sok represents the husband's first wife. The first wife has been permanently incorporated into the social persona of her husband. There is no equivalent practice for a man marrying a widow. Marriage as a rite of social maturation marks a man as a comparatively autonomous social person, while it emphasises a woman's dependence. Her membership of the 'moral community' is thus dependent on him.

AGE AT MARRIAGE

Marriage incorporates men and women into full membership of the 'moral community'. Marriage endows the girl with the auspicious powers associated with the domain of the married woman and menarche brings about pollution. It is marriage which is ritually elaborated and not menarche and it is marriage which confers the status of woman (strī) on a kumari. Marriage should take place before menarche and a girl who reaches menarche and is not married will be excluded from the full ritual domain of a kumari. This begs the question of the relation of physical maturation to social maturation and it is in this light that I want to consider age at marriage.

A widely held opinion is that girls should be married before menarche; and that failing this they should at least have become engaged by this time. By and large this opinion seems directly related to practice. Most married women in the village claimed to have been married before or if not, very shortly after puberty. However there seems to be a trend for marriages to take place at a slightly later age, either near or just after puberty.[17] Some point to the late age of marriage in the city and identify themselves with 'city people' criticizing the practice of 'village people' whom they see typically as marrying their daughters very young.[18] They argue that a small bride is of no use to her in-laws, she cannot work. Older people and those with a more

traditional outlook argue that a young bride adapts to her in-laws more easily than an older one and see an additional danger in late age of marriage as encouraging promiscuity among young women. Even those families who claim to favour a later age of marriage seem to marry girls off no later than two years after puberty.

Even if they are not married by menarche, most girls have undergone the formal betrothal ceremoney (sagāī, see chapter 5) by this time and wear the distinctive anklets that mark their betrothed status. Unlike the toe rings and bangles that women wear at marriages, these anklets do not have to be discarded when a woman is widowed. The girl's association with her future husband's family is also marked by the gifts that arrive for them on the festivals of Rakhi and Holi (see Appendix 2). Small girls await their own betrothals eagerly and long to wear the status conferring anklets. Engagements are not often broken and most castes discourage this practice by levying fines on those who break engagements. Furthermore many believe that it is not honourable (ijjatkibāt) to break an engagement. Engagement before puberty marking as it does the beginning of the cycle of marriage ceremonies that are only really completed with the childbirth rituals (see chapter 6) seems to function in some ways as a substitute for prepuberty marriage.

There was one apparently normal marriageable girl two or three years past puberty whose marriage had not been arranged. Her case illustrates attitudes to marriage and engagement. She was of the Nai caste and their marriage patterns seemed to differ from other castes in the village. The girl's sisters had also been past puberty when their marriages were arranged and performed. Nevertheless the girl felt awkward and was very sensitive about her unmarried state. Villagers not close to the family would criticise the parents for having left the arrangements for the marriage so late. In particular they would criticise her mother for allowing

such a 'big' unmarried girl to move about the village as she did. She was often sent out to perform jobs for her mother who, had to visit many households in her function as a ritual specialist. The girl also occasionally worked as a wage labourer in the fields of richer land owners. If she had been married or engaged her behaviour, provided it was carried out with the right kind of demeanour would not have incurred criticism; as it was she could do nothing to prevent unkind gossip.

Although still referred to as kumari and allowed to perform Sanja puja without criticism, she was not encouraged to go near the Hanuman temple. Neither was she fed on other occasions when kumari were honoured by being given food. Menarche had associated her with the polluting inauspicious aspect of female sexuality without incorporating her into the 'moral community' where she could be associated with auspicious powers.

Girls whose engagement had been arranged were in a similar position ritually but since the action of engagement had shown that family's intention was to put a stop to this anomalous position they were criticised less. They were not seen as likely to endanger the community in the same way.

REASONS FOR EARLY MARRIAGE

Unmarried girls past puberty seem to be a threat to the 'moral community' because many people feel that if a girl past puberty is left unmarried, then she will run away and find her own husband. Women of all ages agree that no parents would trust a physically mature girl to keep away from illicit encounters with young men if she were not married. Given that most marriages take place before puberty, it is not clear on what grounds fears are based or how far they are justified. Various scandals about the behaviour of married women occurred during my stay but there were never any proven incidences of the misbehaviour of unmarried girls, although rumours circulated about the behaviour of one or two seemingly respectable

married women before their marriage. The behaviour of the unmarried girl described above was under constant scrutiny. Nevertheless women were full of stories about girls from 'other villages' who had run away and become prostitutes in the city. Consequently they kept a close watch on unmarried pubescent girls. One woman commented sadly: 'The world has become dark and now prostitutes practise their trade openly. This is because girls marry late'.

It is thought that if girls do run away and live with men then the family will lose ijjat (honour). Such an event is considered shameful. Whether married or unmarried a constant theme in a girl's life is that she should not bring shame (sarm) to her family, particularly in regard to behaviour with men. Ideally even if she runs away from her husband because he ill treats her (a socially accepted reason for such an action) she should let her parents arrange a second match for her, for in this way she runs less risk of losing honour and incurring shame. If she chooses a new husband herself she will be criticised and people will accuse her of being too free with men. As women's position in the adult 'moral community' is defined by her relation to a man and even after marriage her sexual behaviour must be seen to controlled by others, even if her relation with her husband is broken.[19] (Chapter 2 gave some indication of how these beliefs are reflected in residence patterns).

It is possible that the prevalence and popularity of pre puberty marriage is linked to practical considerations such as competition for desirable husbands but this was never given as an explanation by the villagers. The reasons they gave concerned the view they took of a girl's physical maturity. Therefore since this pertains directly to the theme of how femaleness and women are perceived, I have limited my discussion to this aspect of the question and concentrated on the issue of mature female sexuality.

Yalman's discussion of puberty rites in the Sinhalese Tiyyar and Nayar communities seems relevant here. He suggests that there will be public rites connected with the appearance of female sexuality where the marital bond is weak and easily broken and that 'mock marriage cum menstruation ceremonies connect women to clean pure appropriate men or at least to objects symbolizing the ritual purity of the male principle' (1963: 48). Menstruation is the focus because after menarche women can endanger the purity of their caste and line by becoming pregnant through illicit sexual activity. Yalman seems to see puberty rites as performing the same function as a marriage that takes place before puberty. 'In those cases where the relationship between the woman and her spouse is made clear by her marriage where the responsibility for her sexuality is transferred to her spouse, or where a definite relation of alliance is established between the two families then there is less reason to hold very elaborate puberty or prepuberty rites' (ibid. 45). The crux of the argument is that a child receives membership of caste through both his father and his mother and in order to protect the purity of caste and line the purity of women must be ensured by prepuberty marriage or ritual surrounding puberty.

The situation in Ambakhedi is one where prepuberty marriage is the ideal and the generally conformed to norm, and sexual behaviour of unmarried girls past puberty is something that is feared, as we have seen. There were few acknowledged cases of intercaste liasions known to informants and so people were not always very definite about which caste the children of such a mixed liasion would belong to. However there was a general feeling that 'if the seeds of the plant are mixed then the plant will change'. This and other similar remarks suggest a belief that both the mother and the father contribute to the caste membership of the child. It also seems that a child of mixed parentage would belong to whichever caste was the lowest.[20]

People gossiped about an instance in another village where the children of a high caste man and a low caste leather worker woman had had to marry the children of leatherworkers. Women who run away with men from other castes are, according to most informants, outcasted whether the man they run away with is high or low caste. The Rajputs referred several times to the case of a woman in a nearby village which had become something of a 'cause celebre'. The woman had run away with a milk merchant some years earlier and had set up house with him in the city. Having had several children and having become a widow, she wanted to be readmitted to her caste. However despite her offer to pay a large fine and hold a feast for members of the caste in the district, the caste council had decided not to let her return and a decision had been made not to permit marriages between Rajput children and the children of the

Thus it would seem that in addition to ijjat and the emphasis on woman's sexual behaviour not being seen to be under the control of the woman alone, there are underlying concerns about the purity of caste and line involved in the arguments about prepuberty marriage and this shapes the way in which the relation between physical and social maturation is perceived. An unmarried girl past puberty, threatens not only the honour of the 'moral community' but also the principles of patriliny and purity on which the community is organised. Her ritual inauspiciousness and ambiguity reflects this.

MENARCHE IN THE NATAL HOME

In general, as Yalman's hypothesis predicts, prepuberty marriage seems to pre-empt an elaborate menarche ritual. However menarche is marked by a small ritual if it occurs under two sorts of circumstance: the first is when menarche does occur before marriage, and the second is when it occurs when a married woman is visiting her parents' home. If menarche occurs under other circumstances, a girl simply

observes the four days pollution taboos she will observe for the rest of her life (see chapter 4) and does not mark the event in any way. The rituals surrounding menarche in the natal home lend credence to the idea that relation between physical and social maturation expressed in ritual is to do with the control of a woman's sexuality, since they seem to express the necessity for mature female physical sexuality to be disassociated from the natal family. First menstruation in the natal home necessitates the girl keeping out of sight of father and elder brothers for four days. If they see her it is though that they will incur dos (misfortune).[21] There are no such restrictions on whom a girl may see or be seen by during later menstrual periods in either her conjugal or natal home. At the end of the four days when menarche occurs in the natal home the girl will go to the well with another older woman. They take with them a small pot of ghi (clarified butter). The girl washes, looks at her reflection in the pot, and then breaks the pot. She may then return to the house and can be seen by all. Informants say that the purpose of this ritual is avoid dos. At the end of all other periods a woman simply bathes and returns to normal household duties.

Two features of the menarche observances in the natal home suggest that the first evidence of a girl's mature sexuality is threatening to her male natal kin - ie. the concealment involved, and the ritual involving the pot. The seclusion of the girl away from the view of her father and brothers seems to separate her mature physical sexuality from her relation to these men. At one level the presence of the physical maturity is acknowledged hence the precautions surrounding it but at another level by concealing it, it is denied. In some families an unmarried girl who menstruates does not have to be as strict in her observation of menstrual taboos at other times as the married woman of the household. The implication seems to be that mature sexuality of a woman is inappropriate in the natal home and must be given as little obvious expression as possible.[22]

The interpretation of the pot ritual, although less clear cut provides similar evidence. There is one other ritual in which a pot of ghī is broken in this way. The comparison of this ritual with the menarche observance is indicative. The ritual concerned is the mul ritual which is sometimes held after the birth of a baby (see chapter 6). Whether it is held depends on whether the baby's horoscope is interpreted as being bhīr (heavy) for the father, if it is, the father is in danger of dos and must perform the mul ritual. In this case until the ritual is performed the father must not look at his child's face. The ceremony is conducted by a Brahman and involves the parents and the child being washed in turmeric, offerings to the sacred fire and concludes with the father being shown the reflection of the child's face in a pot of ghi. The ghi is then thrown onto the fire and the pot is broken.

Kane's commentary on the textual sources concerning children born under Mula horoscopes suggests that the child born under this horoscope may cause the death of either or both parents or loss of wealth (see Kane: 1974: Vol. iv, 1.63). The remedy is to abandon the child or ensure the father does not see the child's face for eight years. Although this textual interpretation and the remedies involved are both more explicit and drastic than the villagers' beliefs about the Mul ceremony, the theme of danger, and the idea that danger can be avoided by not seeing the child and in the ritual by destroying the child's reflection or in the text by it's death, all suggest that breaking the pot is about removing the inauspicious consequences a child may have for its father. In the case of menarche it is the timing of menstruation, not birth which brings this danger. (Interestingly Yalman notes that in Ceylon the exact time of the first beginnings of periods is noted and a horoscope is drawn up and this supercedes the birth horoscope). It is also a fairly widely held notion that the first thing a woman sees after bathing at the end of any menstruation will affect the nature

of any child she then conceives. Ideally she ought to see her husband or failing that a god but to see other men or even animals might result in the baby being affected by them.[23] The care taken about a girl seeing her father or brothers during menstruation and before she has destroyed one image in a pot suggests that their association with any future children she may have is symbolically denied.

In Gough's analysis of initiation rites occurring in the Malabar coast of India (Gough 1955), she interprets the danger that an unmarried girl at puberty presents for her brother and father and the older members of the lineage as the product of 'repressed incestuous desires' on the part of these men for the girl. She argues that initiation rites represent 'the reluctant renunciation' of the sexuality of women by these men. Gough's argument is that the danger associated with a girl at puberty is related to the emotional psycho-dynamics, of the Oedipus complex and the incest taboo. As Yalman has commented the Oedipus complex is a controversial theory rather than any undisputed universal fact of human existence and it is possible to interpret the danger associated with female puberty in social rather than psychological terms as he himself has done. Fox has suggested (1967: 55) there is a distinction between exogamy and incest and in explaining danger at the social level it is wiser to focus on exogamy. Thus menarche in the natal home seems threatening for two social reasons, first in an unmarried girl it represents the onset of a potential threat to the honour of the family and its purity; secondly it seems to connect male members of the natal family to an aspect of the girl's existence in which they have no rights. For a married woman who reaches menarche in her natal home, this is the only occasion on which a woman is seen as inauspicious to her natal family. Under all other circumstances the very dissociation of this family from their physical sexuality seems to make her particularly auspicious (see in particular chapters 7 and 8).

MENARCHE AND DHARMĀ

Beliefs about the dharmā of parents and of kumari and adult women also express the undesirability of a girl's mature sexuality being associated with her natal kin. Dharma is a concept central to Hinduism and consequently much has been written about it. Very simply 'It involves one's duties as a Hindu and therefore is often defined as the very essence of religion. Yet it encompasses one's duty to one's family, caste and even one's self image, just as much as it does one's religious obligations. It is closely related to the theme of hierarchy for it emphasises duty according to caste, station, age and sex' (Opler 1968: 220). Thus dharma varies according to age, caste and sex. Weightman and Pandy (1978) have discussed the different ways in which it can be translated including inherent character duty and religion and have argued that all the different nuances centre round a core meaning which they describe as the 'inherent mode of behaviour proper' (227) to a certain state. In understanding the social significance attached to stages of physical growth it is therefore a central concept. It is also central in understanding how the 'moral community' is organised.

In Ambakhedi I was told that it was the dharma of parents to arrange the marriages of their daughters and that it was 'good dharma' to arrange such marriages before puberty. One aspect of prepuberty marriage therefore relates to the dharma of the parents. The dharma of the girl herself is also thought relevant, for even if not married, at menarche a girl's dharma becomes patikādharmā, the dharma of the husband. This phrase was used interchangeably with strīkādharmā (the dharma of a woman). Sometimes people would refer to a woman's menstrual periods as her strikadharma or patikadharma, again indicating that dharma is an 'inherent mode of behaviour proper' to a certain state, in this case a physical state. Marriage changes a girl from a kumari into a 'married woman' but even if marriage has not occurred by menarche, the physical changes in a girl mean that her dharma is now that of a stri (woman)

and should be directed towards a husband. However as we have seen unless this dharma is ritually legitimated by the social transformation of marriage, it cannot be fulfilled and is inauspicious. For strikadharma to be auspicious, it should be brought about by social change at marriage and then physical change at puberty.

An interview with one old man summarised the way in which the concept of dharma is used to explain the necessity for prepuberty marriages. The following is a paraphrase of it. He began by explaining that a father who married his daughter when she is seven, earns the greatest religious merit (punya). If he marries her when she is nine he earns less merit, and if he marries her when she is eleven he earns even less. If a father marries a daughter after she is eleven, then it is not a work of dharma and he will earn no merit. (Eleven is seen as the approximate age of menarche). If a father leaves marrying a daughter until she is past puberty, then he will incur dos. Other informants were more specific about the nature of this dos, arguing that it would mean that the parents would live in poverty and starvation in their old age. After the age of eleven the dharma of a girl becomes patikadharma. Once past menstruation a woman is capable of bearing children and every year a woman remains unwed past this age is a year when she might have had children and has not.[24] Again the inappropriateness of mature female physical sexuality in the natal home and the inauspiciousness of an unmarried adult woman are recurring themes. It should be noted that marriage only makes some aspects of women's ritual state auspicious, they are still polluting at childbirth and menstruation even after their marriage.

VIRGINITY

The interpretation of the customs surrounding menarche in the natal home reflect the articulated beliefs about the only safe context for mature female sexuality being marriage.

However although the danger associated with menarche in the natal home can be associated with some certainty with the dangers that the sexual misbehaviour of unmarried women can present to the social structure, it is not a total explanation for why menarche should mark the end of a kumari's purity rather than say the loss of her virginity after marriage; nor for the reasons why subsequent menstrual periods are regarded as polluting. Leach comments that 'Yalman is possibly correct in claiming that throughout South India and Ceylon there is a one-to-one correlation between the occurrence of stress on female puberty rites which have the overall form of marriage and the existence of a high evaluation of close local group endogamy. The existence of such a correlation in this geographical area is a matter of ethnographic interest, but it cannot be interpreted in any causal sense; there is no logical necessity that wherever we have one phenomenon we must also have the other' (1970: 121).

However although the 'correlation' cannot be interpreted in any causal sense, it does suggest that something specific is being conveyed about the nature of femaleness that is not conveyed where this correlation does not occur. In many cultures as Hastrup (Hastrup, 1978) has suggested, where it is important that children are only fathered by socially approved genitors, virginity until marriage is made the focal symbol. A virgin is pure and loss of virginity results in impurity. One consequence of having menarche as the focal event for the onset of female impurity is that something different is conveyed about female power than when virginity is used as this focal event.

It can of course be argued that prepuberty marriage is an institution concerned with the issue of virginity. In Ambakhedi there is no test of virginity before marriage as there is in some cultures. Neither is there any parading of the bloodstained sheets after the consummation of the marriage. This does seem to happen in other areas of India and Hastrup

quotes various sources on this point (ibid. 56) as evidence for the importance of virginity in India as a whole. It is not clear which regions she is referring to and/or what the norms concerning the age of marriage and other sexual mores are in these regions. She cites Hershman's data on the Punjah at one point and it is possible that in this area at least Islamic customs may have influenced even Hindus to pay more attention to virginity. Be that as it may, in Ambakhedi, prepuberty marriage seems to overshadow the issue of virginity, and the purity of the kumari stems from the fact that she has not reached menarche rather than from her virginity per se.[25]

Another objection to this argument might be that a girl's status changes after marriage and the position of the new daughter-in-law is inferior to that of the kumari. Since marriage is the occasion on which a girl loses her virginity, it could therefore be argued that the inferior position of the married woman is due to the loss of her virginity. Apart from considerations about the position of the new bride in her husband's family gotra (see chapter 2) which may lead to this status, it should also be pointed out that norms about the timing of marriage and the timing of the consummation ceremony (the āno) separate the two events. Therefore marriage is always separated from the defloration it legitimates and so it is marriage not sex which results in the change of status for the kumari.

This can be further illustrated by the notion that weddings are consummated soon after they have been performed, do not bring honour (ijjat) to the families involved. Where marriages are performed before puberty this interval creates little problem because neither the parents of the bride or the groom want the marriage to be consummated until the bride is physically ready to bear children. However the situation for girls married after puberty can be difficult. There was a case of a groom of twenty and a bride of about fifteen or sixteen who had reached puberty some three years earlier.

Unlike some women the girl had learnt the 'facts of life' from her sisters-in-law in her parental home before marriage. She and her husband decided that they did not want to wait until the ano (consummation ritual) to consummate their marriage even although in this instance because of the age of both parties it had been decided that it would be held after only a token waiting period, that is six months after the wedding.[26] So, on one of the bride's short visits to her husband's home about four weeks after the wedding ceremony the couple contrived to spend the night together. News of this leaked out and there was considerable discussion among the neighbours and members of the household about the incident. It was felt that it was a shameful action and one likely to harm the family's reputation if it became widely known. Many older people said it was further evidence of the advisability of ensuring that marriages took place well before the puberty of the bride, since early marriage avoided scandals of this kind. The censure the event incurred rested not only on the fact that marriage had been consummated without the appropriate ritual but that the haste with which it was consummated 'looked bad'.

A wedding then is kept distinct from its consummation, and marks a radical change in status which the consummation does not. No ano ritual is ever held before a girl's menarche and it is menarche not loss of virginity that makes the girl polluting. Thus defloration and the girl's first sexual experience are given less social significance and ritual elaboration than a wedding. Menarche, not loss of virginity marks the onset of a woman's dangerous polluting powers.

The significance of this can be seen when the symbolic implications of both menarche and defloration are considered in more detail. Defloration involves a woman's inviolate body being penetrated by a man. The basic structure of symbolism seems to be as follows:

inviolate woman = purity

woman plus man = violated woman = impurity

A woman's impurity stems from her contact with the opposite sex (see Hastrup 1978: 55ff). The symbolism surrounding menarche has a different structure:

a woman before puberty = purity = no mature sexuality

a woman after menarche = a woman with mature sexuality

= impurity

If this interpretation is correct in contrast to a situation where defloration is made the focal sensory symbol, the underlying message is not that woman's contact with a man lowers her status but mature female physical sexuality is impure, per se. In addition while the cult of virginity may result in sexual abstinence in women being honoured because they have refrained from their contact with men, the lack of status given to this position in Ambakhedi must surely encourage women to see their only possible destiny as being connected to a man.[27] This connection will bring honour which balances the degrading status associated with wholly female physical powers such as those made evident at menarche. Moreover the contact with a man that brings them most honour is not that of the marriage bed but the social sexuality involved in their marriage. This is a theme that will be developed in subsequent chapters, but is one facet of the symbolism which divides women among themselves and makes their closest loyalties turn towards men.

SOCIAL AND PHYSICAL MATURATION

Women's physical maturity is also devalued in another, more subtle way. Marriage as the event of social maturation is ritually elaborated. Celebrations go on for fourteen days. Menarche is the subject of minimal elaboration. This seems linked to the different status accorded physical and social sexuality referred to in the introduction.

Writing on life crisis rites in general, La Fontaine comments 'The biological events can be invested with social significance which can emphasise both their creative and destructive (dangerous) elements of the physical nature of women and by ritual seek to control it (Richards 1956; Douglas 1966: 147)' (La Fontaine 1972: 163). In some cultures such as that of the Bugisu described by La Fontaine bodily changes and those of social status are treated as indistinguishable. In other cultures they are not and the relation between physical and social change is different (Richards 1956: 2). The latter situation holds in Ambakhedi and while Bugisu rituals indicate the place of female processes and in particular the control of women's physical procreative powers by men in Bugisu culture (La Fontaine 1972); the lack of elaboration of changes in Ambakhedi reveals that if women's procreative processes are ultimately controlled by men they are controlled in a very different way.

This point becomes clearer when Audrey Richard's work on the Chisungu ceremony of Bemba girls is considered (Richards 1956). This is a form of ritual initiation which all girls must undergo before they can be married. Richards makes the distinction between nubility and puberty rituals in her analysis (Richards 1956: 52-3). She defines a nubility ritual as one which enables a girl to undertake marriage and a puberty ritual as one marking physical puberty itself. Among the Bemba a girl must achieve physical puberty and perform a small puberty ritual before going onto the full-blown nubility rites of the Chisungu. In this case it is true the nubility rites are the subject of more elaboration and celebration than puberty itself but they cannot take place unless a girl has reached a certain physical stage in her development. It may be that in every society in the last resort the social is given preminence over the physical. This is perhaps what is inherent in the nature-culture relationship described in so many societies (but see criticism of this

debate in the introduction). However in societies such as the Bemba and the Bugisu, the physical is given greater preminence than it is in the rituals of Ambakhedi. In contrast, beliefs in Ambakhedi indicate that marriage should precede menarche and this and the elaboration of marriage seem to express the way in which social maturation 'encompasses'[28] physical maturation. Thus while in the Bemba case social maturation is made dependent on physical maturation, in Ambakhedi it is as if the situation is reversed,- hence the ambiguous position of the unmarried girl past puberty.

This is not to say that menarche is not important at all, for the concern over its appearance in relation to the timing of menarche indicates that while on one level the social rite de passage of marriage is given pride of place at another level physical maturation is recognised to endow a girl with certain powers. She becomes both fertile and polluting at this point. This pattern of a social transformation preceding or being made more elaborate than a closely connected physical event that is nevertheless represented as powerful and dangerous is a pattern that recurs at childbirth (see chapter 7). It seems to indicate a relation between social and physical events which is reminiscent if not identical to the relationship that Dumont argues exists between hierarchy and power. He writes '...hierarchy cannot give place to power as such without contradicting its own principle. Therefore it must give place to power without saying so...' (Dumont 1970: 77). The social change can never be wholly independent of the physical change but the ritual elaboration of marriage in contrast with the danger and pollution associated with puberty that should only take place within the confines of marriage express both the independence and interdependence of the two events. The social does not give place to the physical but the power of the physical is acknowledged.

Another quotation from Dumont seems relevant to this, again it is on the way that hierarchy 'encompasses' other principles.

'Here we have an example of the complementarity between that which encompasses and that which is encompassed. a complementarity which may seem a contradiction to the observer... it must be stressed that we have made a first step out of the dualism of the 'religious' and the 'politico-economic' of idealism and materialism, of form and content'.(Dumont 1970; 78-79). This takes the argument into deeper waters than can be looked at here but the aim of contrasting the African material with that of Ambakhedi is to illustrate how the relation between biological and social events varies between cultures and that while in one the emphasis may be on control and dependence, in another such as Hindu society, it may be more useful to look at the relation in terms of notions such as 'encompassing' and 'complementarity' which Dumont uses to describe hierarchy in Hindu society. It also provides a framework for consideration of the place which women's physical powers give her in the 'moral community'.

EROTICISM AND ASCETICISM

The complexity of the relationship between what I have called the physical and the social seems to find expression, in other aspects of mythology and thought in Hinduism especially in the relationship between the concepts that O'Flaherty describes as 'eroticism' and 'asceticism'. For a man, in theory, marriage is the beginning of just one of a number of stages that a man should pass through during his lifetime. At marriage he passes from being a 'chaste student' to being a householder; later when he has had a son and brought this son up, he should pass on first to becoming a vanaprastha : a man who dwells in the forest with or without his wife, and then to being a sannyasi, an ascetic who renounces everything (O'Flaherty 1973). O'Flaherty looking at the mythology of Siva puts forward the suggestion that there is a certain tension between the qualities of eroticism and asceticism in

Indian thought. Siva overcomes the tension between these two qualities by combining them within himself and alternating between expressing one or other aspect of his dual nature. In the lives of mortal men, O'Flaherty argues, this tension is expressed in the seemingly contradictory aims in the various stages of a man's life-cycle.

As a householder a man is very much involved in the physical world. He is allowed to be sexually active because his 'erotic' activity is used for the continuation of his line and the perpetuation of an ordered human existence. Yet once he has fulfilled his dharma in this respect the next stage for him is to renounce the world with which he has been so actively involved. The tension lies in the paradox that a man cannot effectively renounce the world unless he has fulfilled his obligations towards it and been actively involved with it. Thus eroticism and the wordly involvement it entails are both subjugated under the higher goals of asceticism or renunciation, nevertheless renunciation is dependent on wordly involvement.

A woman however theoretically only passes through two stages - that of being unmarried and that of being married. Theoretically, she should be born as a man to obtain moksa (salvation)[29] and the final stage of sannyasi does not seem to be open to her .[30] Therefore the balance between the qualities of 'eroticism' and 'asceticism' is not expressed in the same way in a woman's life-cycle as it is in a man's. Moreover a woman's physiology makes certain ascetic practices impossible for her. A man can gain spiritual strength through seminal retention. A woman cannot control her menstrual or other sexual secretions in this way.[31] Thus the relation between 'eroticism' and 'asceticism' with respect to a woman's bodily functions presents a different set of conceptual problems than a man's presents.[32] It is interesting to speculate whether the insistence that marriage occur before menarche and the ambiguity of menarche itself if it occurs before marriage serves to embed the

changes that take place in a woman's body in a socially manipulable framework. The social world that a woman becomes involved in at marriage is not the world of the ascetic but a woman is linked to her husband's spiritual welfare at marriage, and therefore theoretically to his ultimate role as an ascetic.[33] A woman's mature physical sexuality is balanced by the position she finds in the 'moral community' at marriage and thus becomes linked to ideals that seek to transcend to the everyday social relations with which it is involved.[34] It is devalued at the expense of the higher status social relations.

CONCLUSION

The ritual status of a kumari is indicative not only of the position of immature unmarried women, but also about the status of married physically mature women. A kumari's auspicious purity contrasts with the inauspicious aspects of mature female sexuality. A kumari's marginal honoured status in her natal home contrasts with her eventual status as a married woman in her conjugal home (see chapter 2 for description of the latter). A kumari is excluded from actively participating in the rite of social maturation while married women are not emphasising that although women become part of their husband's social persona at marriage and lose a kumari's honoured status, they also acquire powers which are valued and which they did not have before. Thus the initial ritual state of a woman serves to emphasise the negative aspects of physical sexuality and the positive aspects of social sexuality. The auspicious femaleness of the kumari and the married woman is represented as conceptually distinct from mature physical sexuality.

Beliefs associated with marriage lend strength to the argument that it is the rite of social maturation giving men and women adult membership of 'the moral community'. This seems to be why it is marriage rather than any other event which puts an end to a kumari's special status. It's relation to physical maturation is complicated. Unless a

woman's interest is identified with that of a man her mature sexuality is seen as posing a threat to the order of the 'moral community' in terms of the threat it poses to caste, line and honour. Once married it seems that this threat is limited because a woman's interests are identified with a man although her sexuality may still make her inauspicious on occasion. Marriage thus limits danger rather than removing it completely. Her sexuality is not tamed or made or social, it is merely balanced by a new set of auspicious social paves.

The emphasis on menarche being the source of possible dangers rather than on virginity presents a symbolic contrast between the dangers that are always associated with menstruation (see chapter 4 for elaboration) and the auspiciousness of marriage and the desirable female powers associated with this state. A woman on her own has nothing to compensate for the dangers mature female sexuality inevitably involves, once her interests are identified with those of her husband and through him with the status quo of the 'moral community' she acquires powers that seem to compensate for the negative aspects of being a woman. The emphasis on a woman's visible dependence suggests not that there are no honoured female states but these can only be achieved through a woman's association with a man thereby showing she is not threatening the order of the 'moral community'. Finally the fact that the event of marriage is given more elaboration than menarche and that marriage is seen as separate from the sexual act reflects an underlying theme common in Hindu thought and mythology about the relative status of sexual and non-sexual aspects of man's existence and the relation between them.

The implications of a kumari's ritual status thus highlight themes which will be developed and elaborated in discussions of other female ritual states throughout the thesis.

NOTES

1. Kane (1974: Vol. II Pt. 1 443) writes that according to the writer of the dharmasastras, Parasava 'a girl of eight is called gauri, one who is nine is called rohini, one who is ten years old is a kannya, beyond this she is a rajasvala'. Locally however, the giving of a daughter was referred to as kanyadan. This was also the term used to refer to the gifts of money and jewellry given to the bride by her natal family and friends after the phera, the central rite in a wedding. (This seems to be the equivalent to the sivcauni described by Mayer (1973: 231)).

2. Gamda is the term that people generally use to refer to the polluting aspects of all bodily secretions. The more sanskritic sūtak is in theory only applicable to birth pollution, but is sometimes used to describe pollution occurring after birth, after death and the pollution caused by an eclipse. Asuddh meaning impure is less frequently used, and when it is used is usually with reference to people rather than objects.

3. It seems that cloth like food can be classified as kacca or pakka. Like pakka food, pakka cloth transmits pollution less easily than its kacca counterpart (cf. Mayer 1973: 33 and Stevenson 1954: 56, 59 etc.).

4. Kane (1974: Vol. II Pt. 2 837, 841 and 847) discusses the place of gift giving in Hinduism, emphasising (847) that gifts bring merit only when made to a worthy person.

5. Nine is considered an auspicious number.

6. Elsewhere in India the kumari also seems to hold a special status. Hershman describes the position in the Punjab as follows: 'The unmarried woman's virgin status in not only socially desirable but also makes her ritually pure relative to her elders, so that on particular occasions she is worshipped as Kannya Devi (Virgin Goddess) her elders touch her feet and make her offerings. It is significant that an unmarried woman is never required to touch a person's feet, not even those of her parents' (Hershman 1977: 273). Jacobson (1970) describes a

similar pattern of behaviour in other areas of north and central India mentioning that while small girls have their feet touched, small boys never do. In Ambakhedi there was no evidence of the worship of small girls, but as elsewhere no woman touches the feet of others before she is married.

7. The following two songs are fairly typical of the genre.

(a) 'A bullock cart goes down the path,
Sanja is sitting inside it,
Her toe rings jangle,
Her gagarā and lugara shine,
Because the road is uneven,
Her body is jolted'.

Toe rings are only worn by married women. The lugara is the over-sari and the gagara the full skirt traditionally worn by women in the village.

(b) 'A horse and an elephant have come from
Sanja's sasurāl,
Oh Sanja go to your sasural,
Will you sit on a horse or an elephant?,
Even if you tie my legs together I will not
go to my sasural'.

Sasural refers to a woman's husband's household. This song expresses the reluctance that girls are expected to display when leaving for their sasural after a wedding or a visit to their natal family. It is considered shameful if they do not cry.

8. Interestingly Crooke has the following comments on rain making in northern India which offer an alternative view of the rowdiness of the women. 'Nudity is essential in many magical rites and appears prominently in rain magic. The possible explanation of the custom is that clothing pollutes the magician and its absence indicates absolute submission to the will of the higher Powers. Many cases are on record of high caste women going to the fields in a time of drought at night and stripping themselves naked... The popular explanation of such practices is that they are such a subversion of the natural order of things that Indra or some rain godling is shamed or moved to pity and grants the needed rain but this can hardly be accepted as the real motive underlying the ritual. Water being one of the main sources of fertility and therefore used in the marriage rite, we may conjecture that the performers in this magical rite of rainmaking divest themselves of their clothing in the hope that the desired

rain will fertilize them and that from them fertility will be communicated to the thirsty crops' (Crooke 1926: 71). It is possible that the 'popular explanation' bearing as it does on 'a subversion of the natural order' has more explanatory power than Crooke realised.

9. I can find no other sources which indicate that Hanuman is associated with rain but Crooke gives the following account from the Central Provinces of what a 'Gapagiri' (literally white hail scarer) is said to do to avert a hail storm. '...when a storm is threatened (he) implores Mahabir Hanuman the ape godling, to disperse the clouds. If this appeal fails, he proceeds to threats declaring he will kill himself and throws off his clothes. If her husband happens to be absent at this critical time, his wife goes to the shrine of Hanuman and stands naked before his image, Hanuman being one of the chief village guardians and the giver of fertility' (Crooke 1926: 75). Crooke also reports that Hanuman was sometimes propitated to stop fierce winds (ibid. 79). Therefore this association with rain making in this context does not seem that remarkable given the wider association he seems to have with other aspects of the weather.

10. This seems reminiscent of the following practice described by Crooke for the Punjab. 'In the Punjab, the village girls as an old woman, the crankier the better, passes, douse her with cowdung dissolved in water, or she is made to sit under the spout of a house and get a drenching when the rain falls. The language she uses under these afflictions is believed to strengthen the charm' (Crooke 1926: 77). Crooke believes that the basis of this practice is a belief in a kind of sympathetic magic. The victim is doused with a purifying substance - water or cowdung in the hope that this will bring a form of purifying ie. fertilizing substance from the sky ie. rain.

11. A dakan is thought of as a living woman who has magical powers to harm others by making them ill or causing them pain. Some believe that these powers come from an association with the god Hanuman as described. Others believe that these powers are passed from mother to daughter (cf. Mayer 1973: 205). Dakins are considered to have a particular glaring expression in their eyes and are also said to have dishevelled and bristling hair. There are many stories about them eating children (this may be linked with the comparison of a witch with a woman on

the first day of her period). As stated above I never heard tell of a kumari becoming a witch and Malcolm in his description of witchcraft beliefs in Malwa in the nineteenth century says that it was most often 'the old and wrinkled' (Malcolm 1970: 212).

12. A boy must have all his first hair cut. This hair is known as petkā bal, hair of the womb. This corresponds to the classical tonsure ceremony (the cudukarma) which according to Basham (1971: 161), 'took place in the third year and was confined to boys; with various rites the child's scalp was shaved, leaving only a topknot which in the case of a pious Brahman, would never be cut throughout his life'. A girl may have hers cut but if her parents dedicate it to some deity then this will not be necessary. Some consider it a work of special merit to give such a girl in marriage. The reasons for this are unclear and I hope to deal with the subject at greater length elsewhere. Petkabal (hair of the womb) is considered polluting because of its association with the polluting biproducts of birth. However by offering the child to a deity the hair seems to lose its association with the 'bad sacred' forces of pollution and becomes associated with the good 'sacred' forces of a deity. It seems as if the association of the girl with the deity makes her and by association her fertility with which her hair is closely associated, a more valuable gift than she would be otherwise.

13. There were adults who lived alone, and women who were single because they were widowed or had left their husbands, but all these single householders had been married once (see chapter 2).

14. Kapadia (1966: 168) indicates that in early Hindu law marriage was necessary for a woman to be cremated although the same rule did not apply to man, who may undergo an upanayan(initiation ceremony); whereas for a woman marriage is the only 'sacrament' that may be performed for her. The Nambudiri make a special provision for a Nambudiri spinster's 'marriage' to take place before her cremation. (ibid. 108).

Bennet (1976 (a): 35) writes 'Campbell notes that honoured saints and smallpox victims are said to be posessed by the goddess Sitala and are also like infants buried rather than cremated'. He suggests that all of these categories 'are outside' the community for whom normal Hindu ritual applies. Both achieved yogi and smallpox

victim have for different reasons transcended the normal human state. They no longer need the symbolic final purification of the body which the fire brings. Infants also do not need this purification because they have not yet fully entered the community'.

15. The following quotation from Manu indicates how widespread this attitude is in Hinduisn in general. 'She should do nothing independently even in her own house. In childhood subject to her father, in youth to her husband, And when her husband is dead to her sons, she should never enjoy independence' (trans. Basham 1971: 182).

16. The significance of the various pieces of jewellry that a woman wears is described in detail in an article by Doranne Jacobson (1976). 'Bennet (1976 (b): 201) describes a similar collection of articles used by the Brahman Chetriwoman in Nepal, these are known as saubagya saman. She writes 'The saubagya saman then, symbolised female sexuality (since they increase woman's powers of seduction by making her more attractive) and its control (since she may only wear them while her husband is alive and presumably her chastity is intact)'.

17. Since few women in the village knew their date of birth or age accurately it was not possible to get accurate data for ages at which marriage takes place. The evidence for the changing age of marriage comes from the perceptions of women and men themselves. Older women who had been married very young (probably about eight and nine) were particularly aware of the different problems of adjustment facing a very young bride and the older brides of nowadays. In addition a report issued by the ICSSR (1975: 146) indicates that overall in India the mean age of marriage has risen from 13.2 years in 1901 to 17.2 years in 1975. It seems possible that the change perceived by the villagers is part of a broader trend. The reasons for this trend seem linked to education, and an increasing reliance on financial resources outside the control of the family. There is in addition the question of the impact of legislation concerning social reform. The question is too complex to be pursued at length here.

18. 'The Civil Marriage Act, 1872, fixed the minimum age of marriage at 14, and attempts to prevent early consummation gradually raised the age of consent to 13. Finally the Child Marriage Restraint Act, 1929, fixed the minimum age for marriage for males at 18 and for females at 14 which was later amended to 15). While the practice of child marriage was made a penal offence for parents or those performing, conducting or directing it and for the adult bridegroom, the validity of such marriages was left untouched' (ICSSR 1975: 42). The villagers are aware of such government legislation and one man told how his maternal uncle had been imprisoned some fifteen years earlier for violating the law. However although marriages for girls under the age of 14 were performed during my stay, there was no attempt to enforce the law. Various social work agencies have also endeavoured to prevent child marriage by programmes of lectures and even films. One of the most significant factors in whether a family decides to wait to marry its daughters until they are older as I have indicated in the text, seems to be whether and how far they identify themselves with the ways of 'city people' from whom it seems to their eyes, the government legislation stems. One is reminded of the distinction that Barbara Ward makes between 'an internal observer's model' and a 'homemade or immediate model' (Ward 1965: 113). The significant factor can then be described as whether the villagers convert the 'internal observer's model' of city life into 'a homemade immediate model' which has relevance for them.

19. A woman who is in control of her own sexuality seems particularly threatening. Some older women disapprove of birth control for women in any form. They say it will mean that 'daughters-in-law will no longer listen', explaining that if a woman does not fear the consequences of pregnancy she will not obey her husband or his family. She becomes threatening in this instance because one sanction operating against her independence has been removed.

20. Although the principle of hypergamy does appear to operate in certain parts of India it only appears to operate when the caste of the mother and father are not too far mismatched with respect of degree. If they are too far mismatched then the contribution of the mother in the caste of the child seems to become evident and the hypergamy principle does not work. For the Malwa region Mayer (1973: 25) writes: 'The child of an informal union, though overtly affiliated to its

progenitor's caste, is in fact, thought of as a kind of 'second class member'....If her (ie. the mother's) caste is very much lower than his own (ie. the father's) or if he is a man of little influence and wealth, the children's membership of the caste may hardly exist in more than name. If on the other hand, the mother's caste is nearly equal to the father's and if he is respected, the children's mixed parentage will not matter so much and people will tend to overlook it'. Mayer also cites cases where a child belongs only to his mother's caste as when a child is born to a widow or divorced woman (ibid: 25). Elsewhere he writes 'local opinion explains the incidence of the same clan names in several subcastes by the outcasting of a man for living with a woman of lower subcaste' (Mayer 1973: 163). The place of a woman in determining caste membership although not clearly defined is evident from this data.

21. Kane's description of certain Hindu writers comments on this situation seems to have a similar theme. 'The parents and also the eldest brother go to hell on seeing (an unmarried) girl reaching the state of rajisvali' (Kane 1974: Vol. II Pt. 1 443). Rajisvali is the term used to refer to a menstruating girl in this context.

22. Hershman describes a similar position in the Punjab. 'There is no ceremonial recognition of a girl's first menstruation and an unmarried girl does not formally observe any of the strict menstrual taboos of the married woman. But the Punjabis have rather an ambiguous attitude towards a menstruating virgin and the general attitude is for the mother to quietly instruct her daughter to stop cooking during her period' (Hershman 1977: 272-3).

23. This appears to be a similar version of a belief reported by Mayer (1973: 204) 'According to this theory villagers say that the child looks like the person first seen by the woman immediately after conception (ie. the husband, it is to be hoped)..'

24. The interpretation of the old man echoes many of the themes expressed in Hindu texts which is not surprising for the man had more knowledge of the texts than most. For example Kane quotes the writer Pasara 'If a person does not give away a maiden when she is

in her twelfth year, his pitrs (ancestors) will have to drink every month her menstrual discharge' (Kane 1974: Vol. 2 Pt. 2 433 seq.). Kapadia also refers to source from the dharmasastra who writes 'the father or guardian incurs the sin of destroying an embryo at each appearance of menses as long as the girl is unmarried after puberty' (Kapadia 1966 : 139).

25. Allen (1976: 294) suggests that virgins are seen as dangerous all over India - I found no indication of such danger unless it is in the case of an unmarried virgin past puberty.

26. Marriages are never consummated until after puberty and depending on the age of the bride and groom, the length of times between a wedding and its consummation seems to vary between about six months and six years with an average length being about two years.

27. In some cultures notably medieval western Europe, the cult of virginity allowed women at least one honourable alternative to marriage - ie. becoming a nun.

28. Here I am attempting to use the concept 'encompassing' in the way that Dumont uses this word. For examples of this see quotations from Dumont given below in the text and in general Dumont 1970, esp. p.76.

29. Kane (1974: Vol II 946) indicates this but in fact most of the informants questioned maintained that a woman would always be born as a woman and a man as a man. Thus the discussion here on the relation between 'eroticism' and 'asceticism' is an attempt to show that the pattern found in Ambakhedi has parellels in other contexts in Hinduism rather than to suggest that the relation of these values is expressed per se in the rituals and beliefs as they are observed.

30. The relation of women to the values of asceticism presents two distinct problems. One concerns the question of whether women can be ascetics and on this textual and other evidence is confused. In the village itself some informants declared that a woman could not become a sannyasi, while others supported the idea that they could. One old man had lived the life of a wandering pilgrim wearing the ascetic's yellow garb for many years and had

'retired' to the village because of attacks of asthma. He had taken his wife and was fully of the opinion that women could become sannyasi. Ursula King (1975: 117) writes 'Hinduism also declared women illegible for the path of renunciation (sannyasa). Not renunciation but the discharge of her family responsibilities is woman's specific dharma, her most sacred duty. This general injunction not withstanding we know of famous women saints, Lalla, Mirabai, Sarada Devi to name only a few and in our own age, Anandamayi'. Given that the position with regard to women as ascetics is so obviously ambiguous, it does suggest they present a particular conceptual problem with respect to it.

The second problem concerns the temptations that women represent to male ascetics, so that as Kane (1974 Vol. II 581) writes 'those who valued an ascetic life and wanted to wean couples away from wordly ties looked down upon women'. Here women represent wordly ties as opposed to ascetic ideals and represent the 'erotic' side of life as opposed to the 'ascetic'.

31. For a discussion of the place of seminal retention in ascetic practices see for example Cantlie 1977. She writes 'All systems of yoga lay stress on the beneficial affects of seminal retention which is said to cure disease, restore virility and prolong life' (552).

32. The idea that a woman's biology presents a different set of conceptual problems than a man's is not unique to Hinduism. For example Ortner 1974 writes 'Because of woman's greater bodily involvement with the natural functions surrounding reproduction, she is seen as more a part of nature than man is. Yet in part because of her consciousness and participation in human social dialogue, she is recognised as a participant in culture. Thus she appears as something intermediate between culture and nature, lower on the scale of transcendence than man' (Ortner 1974: 76). Thus the particular problems concerning the place of a woman in Hindu culture may represent variations on a more universal theme.

33. Villagers saw a woman gaining half the merit that her husband gained in performing good works and vice versa. Compare also the following comment by Dandekar (cit. King, U. 1975: 117): 'After marriage a woman is generally considered to have no independent existence part from her husband, especially so far as religious practices are concerned'.

34. A story from the Mahabharata quoted by Kapadia seems to justify the idea that in some way marriage serves for a woman at least as an 'ascetic' to the erotic side of life, even although marriage is tied to the social world. 'A daughter of Kuni Garga practised severe penance for the whole of her life. She was however told by Narada that as she was unmarried, she would not go go heaven for all her austerities. Thereupon the woman induced Srngavat of the Galava family to marry her in exchange for half the merit she had earned by her life-long austerities. She stayed with him as a wife for a day and only then the door of heaven was open to her' (Kapadia 1966: 142). Here even when a woman performed austerities it was not enough, and she had to be married.

CHAPTER 4

MENSTRUATION

In the previous chapter the dangers associated with the onset of female physical maturity were discussed. It was pointed out that in general they imply that a woman's physical sexuality has low status. The concern that marriage should occur before menarche together with the rituals surrounding menarche in the natal home suggest that the onset of physical maturity is a time of particular hazard. The ritual dangers seem to be a reflection of the dangers women can pose to caste and line and this time. In this chapter the implications of the menstrual taboos that a women observes throughout the rest her life will be considered. This provides more evidence about the status of physical sexuality. A consideration of the meanings associated with the taboo in myth and symbol also suggests how this manifestation of women's physical sexuality acts as 'the sensory pole' for other aspects of women's lives which are threatening or disruptive to the principles that order the 'moral community'.

The first half of the chapter describes the taboos and beliefs associated with menstruation. The ambiguous qualities of menstrual blood and female physical sexuality in general are then discussed. Finally the association of menstruation with certain kinds of female behaviour is examined with reference to the way that this behaviour is represented symbolically and it's relation to women's position in the 'moral community'.

MENSTRUAL TABOOS

The restrictions a woman must observe for every menstrual period of her life are as follows. A woman becomes achūt (untouchable) as long as her menstrual flow lasts. Most women said that generally this was for four or five

days.[1] To end their untouchability they take a bath which finally removes any impurity associated with menstruation. Some other practices concerned with ritual purity and personal cleanliness seem to vary according to the status of the caste concerned; the Brahmans and the Thakurs bathe daily while other castes openly admit that they do not.[2] However, there does not seem to be a corresponding variation in the strictness of observance of menstrual taboos and as far as I could ascertain all castes seemed to observe them equally strictly. Such variations as do occur seem to be a matter of individual piety.[3]

Colloquially a woman in her period is referred to as cauke bāhar (outside the kitchen), or kaprepahanevālī (one who wears cloth). The latter expression refers to the old rags a woman wears as sanitary protection at this time. Traditionally at other times underclothes are not worn under the sari or gagara.[4] The former phrase refers to the fact that during her period a woman may not enter the kitchen. She is not allowed to cook food for others during this time and should avoid touching dishes, pots and pans. She may not bring water for others since she will pollute it. She may clean dirty dishes but if she does so she will 'wash' them in dry ash since this is a substance which is not believed to transmit pollution as easily as water (cf. Stevenson 1954). In a big joint household there is no problem in this since another woman will take over these duties. Where there is only one woman in the household, usually the husband takes over the cooking and fetching of water at this time. If a woman is on her own she may cook for herself and sometimes her children, but if she does this she may take the precaution of cooking on a small mud stove built on the verandah, and not the stove in the kitchen where she normally cooks.

Husband and wife do not sleep together at this time and not only is sexual intercourse avoided but husbands do not usually allow their wives to sleep on the conjugal mattress normally used, for fear that this will become permanently

polluted. Some women I knew well would refer to the fact that they were in their menstrual periods by telling me that they were sleeping apart from their husbands on particular days, a piece of information I found puzzling at first until I had had its implications spelt out! This is the logical outcome of the belief that women should avoid touching any man at this time and the more pious will refrain from touching other women and children as well. A woman's polluting state also debars her from going to the temple or taking part in any ritual at this time.

In addition to this, a woman must leave off wearing a red spot on her forehead, or vermillion in her hair. These are part of the suhāg of a married woman (see previous chapter), and are similarly discarded during the polluting periods after birth and death (see chapters 6, 7). Previously, according to older informants, a woman would refrain from plaiting her hair or even combing it[5] while she was menstruating. According to some there was also a prohibition on looking in mirrors at this time. However these observances seem to have died out. Older women also said that a girl should remain in one place during her period but again this was something that I did not observe.

Women are not embarassed by menstruation and openly refer to the subject in the presence of other women of all ages[6] but most feel some hesitation in discussing the subject when men are present. They are also careful never to wash menstrual clothes when others can see, for like childbirth and sex, there is a feeling that these processes should be kept hidden. Menstrual cloths are washed rather than burnt or buried because a snake or cow touching a carelessly disposed cloth is believed to cause barrenness in the woman concerned.[7]

Harper describes similar pollution taboos for the Havik Brahman women of South India. He writes 'A frequently heard joke is that a woman has a vacation five times a month... A woman in her period spends a good deal of time chatting and

gossiping with other women who may or may not also be in their periods. She is free to visit other houses but of course remains in the designated 'outside area' (Harper 1964: 168-9). Eichinger (1974: 58) who conducted a survey on pollution periods in Tamilnad also suggests that 'the extraordinary vitality of belief in temporary female impurity...may be explained by the inobtrusive nature of this type of pollution and by the secondary gain it brings to the women', that is that it forms a rest from housework etc. However, the economic conditions of most households in Ambakhedi meant that only women in the wealthiest houses had any leisure during this period. Others worked in the fields when they could not work in the house, and were allowed to do this although generally they worked with grain crops rather than fruit or vegetables which were considered more easily polluted. Most laughed at the idea that menstruation provided them with any kind of holiday saying that they preferred to be involved in the taboo tasks of cooking and carrying water rather than the more arduous tasks allotted to them in the fields at this time. Those who were unlucky enough to be menstruating during major festivals or weddings were usually somewhat discontented at being excluded from the preparation of special rituals and foods.

DANGERS AT MENSTRUATION

In general polluting agents and substances are regarded as dangerous only in so far as they have a power to pollute. Thus high castes will avoid touching or taking food from the Untouchables lest they become polluted. Washing removes pollution caused by external contact. Dumont has argued that 'Elsewhere (ie. outside India) the dangerous contact acts directly on the person involved, affecting his health for example, whereas with the Hindus it is a matter of impurity that is fall of social status or risk of such a fall. This is quite different although traces of the other conception can be found in India' (Dumont 1970: 49). However, as far as

menstruation is concerned people perceive the power that women have to pollute in terms of dangers that they can cause to themselves and to others rather than simply in terms of their power to make others gamda (dirty). When dealing with women it seems that more often we are dealing 'the other conception' than with what Dumont describes as true Hindu notions of purity and impurity.

Women see themselves as being in danger during their periods. They compare their powers to pollute to the powers of an Untouchable and a washerwoman but while these people are not seen as being in danger, menstruating women are. This danger seems to take two forms. The first is a strong but not very lucidly articulated feeling that a woman is more vulnerable to attacks by witches and various kinds of evil spirits at this time. Being in her period seems to associate a woman with these creatures. Some even say that on the first day of her period a woman is like dakin (cf. chapter 3). Be that as it may, she is not accused of attacking others at this time but of being attacked and most women take care to avoid the cremation ground at this time as attacks are particularly likely there. They also carry a piece of iron with them to ward off other attacks.

The second form of danger that they are in concerns the fate that will befall them if they break the menstrual taboos. Most women believe that this will result in some kind of dos ranging from leprosy and barreness through to a particularly unpleasant form of rebirth. The fasts that women undertake on the feast of Rsi Pamcami to be described below, are said to avert this dos, and I give further illustrations of the kinds of dangers women are involved in at this time.

The question as to whether women have a power to endanger men other than their power to pollute men has no clear answer. When asked directly, most women and men would point to the dangers that women themselves were in if they touched

men during their periods indicating the reflexive[8] nature of menstrual dangers. Many men and women denied that men could be harmed by such contact, and many men did not even bother to wash after accidentally touching such women. However, this evidence is contradicted by those who argued that a man could lose his learning if touched by a woman when she was menstruating. It also seems that in many households it is men who determine just how strictly the taboos are observed. This was so in the Nai household described previously where the unmarried but mature daughter was not required to observe taboos so strictly. Women who had married out of the village into the city reported sharing the same beds with their husbands at this time because their husbands did not mind. It is not clear out of what this concern on the part of the husband arises; it may be that he is simply concerned to maintain the difference in status between himself and his wife by demonstrating his relative purity at this time, but on the other hand it could also be because such contact is dangerous for him as well.

The Rsi Pancami myth (recounted below) suggests that women can endanger men at menstruation and writers on menstrual taboos elsewhere in India have recorded men's fear of menstrual blood. For example Kakar writes 'Men have a mortal horror of being near a woman during the time of menstruation. As with many other customs in India, the menstruation taboos have a hoary tradition. Manu is his customary blunt self on the subject: 'The wisdom, the energy, the strength, the might and the vitality of a man who approaches a woman covered with menstrual excretions utterly perish''(Kakar, 1978: 93). Inherent in the beliefs surrounding menstruation is a sentiment that menstrual taboos are dangerous to men, but in the minds of most informants this sentiment is suppressed while the reflexive nature of menstrual danger is emphasised. This is a point that I shall return to below.

RSI PAMCAMI

In asking informants about the dangers associated with menstruation, many referred to the festival of Rsi Pamcami and the stories associated with it. They seemed to use the stories as a kind of 'mythical charter', to use Malinowski's phrase, to justify their menstrual observances. This ritual is one of a number performed by women in the rainy season[9] and is performed specifically to avoid dos incurred by those women who have violated menstrual taboos. It involves a fast, and a puja comprising a series of ritual washings and some sacred stories read by the Brahman. Not all women perform the puja since it is elaborate and takes time and some are too busy. Many of those who do not perform the puja observe a fast on this day so as to mark it in some way. I shall describe it in detail since it encapsulates the beliefs about menstruation and menstrual taboos that are current in the village.

In the early afternoon after they have finished other household chores, those women who are going to perform the puja conduct a series of ritual washings. They clean their mouths 108 times and then wash their bodies 108 times by tipping water from a brass pot this number of times. No explanation is given for the number: it is just one that is considered auspicious. They then dress in their finest clothes and prepare the brass trays which they will take to the temple for the performance of the puja. They bring one tray loaded with raw food stuffs as an offering for the Brahman and another tray with fruit, rice, vermillion, cloth, thread, flour and jaggery which they will offer to Ganesa and the Rsis.[10]

In the temple the women position a small puja stool and on it they draw figures of the Rsis and their seven wives with dry turmeric. By these figures they place a small figure of Ganesa and a water pot. The Brahman supervises the ritual and reads sacred mantras while the women put the offerings

they have prepared in front of Ganesa and the Rsis.

The Brahman then reads out the following sacred stories:

(1) Once the king Pewesh asked Brahma 'Why do women fast on Rsi Pamcami'. Then Brahma replied 'There was a Brahman who had two children, a girl who was married and a boy who was unmarried. The girl became a widow while she was still young. She came back to her natal home to live with her parents. The Brahman was a teacher. One day one of his students came to him and said 'Your daughter has a worm inside her body'. The Brahman was saddened by this and went to seek advice from the Rsi. The Rsi sat and thought and then replied: 'In her seventh life your daughter committed a sin and for this reason she has this trouble now. When she was menstruating she did work inside the house. On the first day of her period a woman is like a witch, on the second day she is like a Brahman killer, on the third day she is like a washerwoman and on the fourth day she is clean'. Then the Brahman asked the Rsi what he should do in order to save his daughter. The Rsi told him to do a fast in the light half of Bhadom on Pamcami (the fifth day) and by doing this his daughter would get mukti (release). The Brahman then did this for seven years and his daughter was saved.

At the end of this story the officiating Brahman emphasises the moral by saying that if a woman commits a sin during her period then she can still gain mukti if she does the fast of Rsi Pamcami. It is worth noting that although the story has a man doing the fast, the Brahman's instruction is that women themselves should fast.

(2) The second story can be paraphrased as follows: A woman should not touch her husband or anyone else during her period otherwise she will suffer dos. There was a Brahman family where the Brahman woman did housework during her period and also touched her husband. In the next life, the woman was turned into a bitch and her husband was reborn as an ox.

Both were reborn into their son's house. On Savpitr Amavas (the yearly ancestor worship) the daughter-in-law was preparing food for the Brahman who had come to perform a puja for the dead husband and wife. The bitch saw this. The bitch then noticed a snake which came and put poison in the food. The bitch became anxious for she saw that the Brahman would die if he ate the poisoned food. The bitch waited until her daughter-in-law was nearby and then attempted to eat the food. The daughter-in-law became angry and hit the bitch with a stick, and prepared new food because the bitch had polluted the food already prepared by trying to eat it.

That day the ox was working in the fields. The son became angry and beat him. In the evening the ox returned home. The bitch came to him and said, 'Today my daughter-in-law hit me with a stick'. The ox said 'Today my son beat me and this pain has come about because you touched me during your period'. The son overheard the animals talking and realising that they were his parents felt much sarm (shame). He went to practise tapasyā (austerities) in the jungle and there met with the five (sic) Rsis. They told him to perform fasts on five successive Rsi Pamcami and said that if he did this then his parents will get moksa (release).

After hearing the stories the women return home. The second story not only has a man performing the fast, but also has a man becoming endangered by the touch of his polluting wife. This bears out what was suggested above that, although for the most part it is women who are seen as being endangered by violating menstrual taboos, men too are vulnerable to dangers.

MYTH OF THE ORIGIN OF MENSTRUATION

In addition to the myths associated with Rsi Pamcami, there is one more myth that is commonly repeated in connection with the menstrual pollution. Most women only seem to know the bare outline of the story, saying that god (bhagavān) committed

a great sin and gave it to women which is why they are polluting at menstruation. When asked why it was given to women rather than anyone else, people say it is because women have children and the argument becomes somewhat circular.

The fullest version of the myth was given by the literate wife of the village Brahman. In the story she told, the god Indra killed a Brahman and hid in the Ocean because he realised that he had done wrong. The other gods sought out Indra and divided his sin among four things. Thus they said that wood should smoke before it burns, rivers should swell up and destroy people, sometimes the earth should open up and swallow people, and women should menstruate.

This myth seems to be a version of the myth recounted by Mathur which he recorded from another village in the Malwa region. Mathur's version makes the one reported in Ambakhedi more comprehensible. He writes 'The god Indra once killed a Brahmin priest who was helping demons (rakshas) against the gods (devatas). The sin of killing a Brahman, however was great even for Indra and he had to abandon his throne and seek shelter in the sea for fear of brahmahatya (sin of killing a Brahmin). The gods left leaderless in their fight, approached Brahma the lord of Creation and sought his advice. Brahma was pleased with their prayers and agreed to divide Indra's sin into four parts...The third part of the sin was given to women; this part of the sin manifests itself in menstruation during which period a woman is impure and has to be avoided...' (Mathur 1964: 105).

Without undertaking a very complex analysis it is worth noting that in both versions of the myth, a god, normally pure, becomes impure through killing and in Mathur's version a Brahman normally pure is associated with a demon. Thus the source of women's temporary impurity at menstruation is linked to beings who are normally extra pure but temporarily become impure because of their association with sin and demons. Bennet commenting on a similar myth told by Hindus in Nepal

writes 'Furthermore it is significant that the other three things which receive a fourth part of the sin, the fire, the river and the mountain [these are the objects in her version of the myth] are all considered sources of purity in Hindu tradition. The structural message of the myth is that menstrual blood too is basically a good thing but due to human weakness [Indra's violent crime] it must be regulated (Bennet 1976a: 193). Thus the myth serves as a useful review of what has been said about menstrual taboos so far. At menstruation a woman who normally has a crucial part of play in daily household activity becomes dissociated from it because she is polluting and dangerous. The danger seems to stem from her association with fierce, passionate disruptive forces. The myth with its theme of Brahman murder reflects this. It also reflects the way that menstruation is an inversion of powers which are normally considered pure and auspicious. In this respect it seems significant that a woman removes her suhag at this time.

THE RAJASVALĪ

The colloquial terms for a menstruating woman were given earlier in this chapter but the phrase used in the Rsi Pamcami stories is rajasvalī, one not normally used by the villagers, although it is sometimes used by the more literate. The word itself is indicative of the qualities associated with menstruation. It comes from the word rajas which is one of the three guns or qualities which influence the temperament of men and women, according to classical Hinduism. Basham writes 'A very important feature of Sankhya metaphysics is the doctrine of the three constituent qualities (guna) causing virtue (sattva), passion (rajas) and dullness (tamas). In its undeveloped state cosmic matter contains these three in equilibrium but as the world evolves, one or other preponderates in different objects or beings and the proportions account for the values of the universe.

Sattva guna (the quality of virtue is present in all things tending to truth, wisdom, beauty and goodness; the quality of passion (ie. rajas) inheres in all that is fierce, violent, energetic, forceful or active; while dullness is found in what is dark, stupid, gloomy, wretched or unhappy' (Basham 1971: 332). Thus menstruation seems to be associated with the passionate side of life.

The villagers are familiar with the idea of guns albeit in a less sophisticated form. According to them, a man or woman whose gun is predominantly rajogun is someone who was quarrelsome and ready to start a fight. A woman in her period was also thought to have rajas as her predominating gun although at this time it was not thought that the gun revealed itself by making her especially quarrelsome. (At other times the gun predominant in a woman varies according to her individual personality as it does with a man, so that the behaviour an individual displays reflects the gun most significant in her make up). It seems then that at the level of the village the gun rajas, is closely associated with ferocity. This is interesting because it has echoes with the association between menstruating women and dakans (witches). Although dakin is usually the term used to refer to someone whose inherent magical powers enable them to cause harm in others, dākinī, a derivative of dakan is used to describe a quarrelsome woman with a fierce temper.[11] Thus the association between menstruation and discordant violent forces seems marked at the verbal level, even if women are not thought violent at this time. I shall return to this below.

THE SYMBOLIC PROPERTIES OF MENSTRUAL BLOOD

The human body is basically the same in different cultures, and some processes such as menstruation seem to present some of the same conceptual ambiguities in different societies. Friedl suggests that menstrual blood everywhere is

regarded as a dangerous and ambiguous substance because it confuses the distinction between life and death. She writes 'The significance of the blood [ie. menstrual blood] must be highly ambiguous. Until a girl has shed menstrual blood she cannot conceive and begin new life. After she has finally ceased to menstruate and at the menopause she can no longer do so. But each monthly flow between these points is the antithesis of life for it means she has not conceived. Thus in a symbolic sense it may be that she is equated with death. Adding to the ambiguity is the fact that women unlike men bleed without injury and do not die from the monthly flow' (Friedl 1975: 29 and cf. Richards, A. 1956: 19).

The ethnographic data from Ambakhedi indicate that informants here share this basic conceptual 'vocabulary' concerning menstrual blood. The description of the rationale behind prepuberty marriage given in chapter 3 shows how menarche is taken as a symbol of a girl's fertility and a fertility that must not be wasted. This fertility is a sign that the girl can produce life. Women who have ceased menstruating never hope to remarry, and according to informants this is because they cannot produce children - they have no promise of life. Magical beliefs concerning menstrual clothes that suggest that one woman may become fertile by stealing the menstrual cloth of another (cf. chapter 3) indicate even more clearly the association between the blood and the power to produce life.

However, as Friedl points out, menstrual blood also indicates absence of life. Every time a woman menstruates and has to cease cooking it is a visible sign to all that she is not pregnant. Mothers-in-law in families were often able to date a pregnancy more accurately than the daughter-in-law because they watched their sons' wives carefully for signs of the presence or absence of menstruation. A woman who menstruates once a month and does not produce children

confirms her barreness publicly by observing the taboos every month. To be barren in an unfortunate condition for the young Hindu wife for her husband may repudiate her and send her home. The absence of life within her womb seems correlated with an absence of fertility in general. People told stories of how farmers setting out to sow a field will avoid looking at a barren woman, if they see her they will turn back for that day lest the crop fail. In general most women said they would avoid looking at a barren woman at all if possible. This perhaps explains certain less common beliefs that a woman should not be seen by others during her period and should not herself use a mirror at this time. Thus menstruation is associated with absence of life and may be a sign of barreness, a condition which appears to be contagious in some way, indicating that woman has power to cause death as well as life.

As well as being an event associated with both life and death, in Hindu society menstruation seems to have more culturally specific connotations. Bennet using material from the Hindu Brahman Chetri community of Nepal suggests that in Hinduism menstrual blood and the taboos and fasts associated with it are linked to 'a perpetual opposition between the loftier ideals of the ascetic (tyagi dharma) and the more practical ideals of the householder' (1976a: 186). She argues that in Hinduism polluting substances are those connected with the organic processes of life and they tie men to the 'samaric round of death and rebirth; these things, which the Hindu householder sees as defiling, are the very things which the Hindu ascetic attempts to escape through his austerity (tapas) and renunciation (tyagi)' (Bennet 1976(a): 186).[12] The householder, whose duty to produce progeny ties him to the organic processes, by observing carefully the pollution taboos connected with these processes attempts to achieve a balance between the erotic and ascetic elements in life. The Chetris too observe the Rsi Pamcami festival and Bennet writes that the

myth 'immediately relates the ascetic/householder opposition to that between male and female. Initially the opposition is balanced. The husband who is an expert in ritual also cares for his family and the wife who is concerned about the prosperity of the fields is devoted to her husband. It is Jaisri's (the wife's) worldly concerns that overcome her devotion and she touches food during menstruation (in the version of the myth recorded by Bennet the wife is so anxious to get the harvest home on time she accidentally touches the dishes), the balance is destroyed. It is restored at the end of the myth by the ascetic Rishis who prescribe strict fasting and bathing rituals of Rishi Panchami to rid the couple of the effect of Jaisri's sin' (Bennet 1976(a) 206). The Rsi Pancami myth with its emphasis on fasting and the ascetic features of the Rsis shows how over-involvement with wordly concerns as symbolised by violation of menstrual taboos can be balanced by ascetic practices and more scrupulous observance of pollution taboos.

In addition to the evidence within the myth itself that menstruation is linked to the wordly (ie. erotic) side of life, there is also the association of menstruation and physical fertility, and its connection with rajogun which as we have seen represents the passionate, 'erotic' aspect of man's nature. An interesting gloss on the idea that menstruation is a process which is somehow antithetical to ascetic practices was provided by the statement of one older woman in reply to whether she still menstruated 'Oh no, I have become Mirabai '. Mirabai is a female ascetic saint. This post-menopausal woman classed herself with Mirabai because she was no longer menstruating. Thus besides the cross-culturally shared associations of being a substance that signifies life and death, in the Hindu context menstruation carries with it the connotation of the erotic worldly side of life and in Hinduism this side of life must always be balanced by the ascetic non worldly aspects of man's existence,

which seek to transcend life and death.

Douglas writes that in general pollution powers 'inhere in the structure of ideas itself' and that they 'punish a symbolic breaking of that which should be joined or the joining of that which should be separate' (Douglas 1978: 113). If her argument is correct then menstrual blood would seem to be polluting on a number of counts. Firstly it is one of the basic tenets of Hinduism that all bodily secretions are polluting (see chapter 2). Douglas argues that this concern over bodily secretions which are substances that by definition violate the boundaries of the human body is related to a concern within society as a whole that social boundaries ie. caste boundaries should not be blurred or crossed. Secondly menstrual blood in addition to being a bodily secretion occupies an ambiguous position between the powers of life and death. It is as it were a 'joining of that which should be kept separate' and thus a substance which is seen as dangerous and/or polluting in many societies. Thirdly the 'erotic' aspect of menstruation may perhaps be interpreted as 'a symbolic breaking of that which should be joined'. At menstruation rajogun becomes predominant and the values of asceticism, unless expressed in scrupulous observance of taboos and/or the fasting of Rsi Pamcami seem to suffer at the expense of the values of eroticism: - the desired balance is not maintained.[14] The anomalies[15] involved in menstruation thus represent a threat to the conceptual principles by which the 'moral community' is ordered. It may be this threat to order which associates menstruation with danger. At menstruation women become vulnerable to forces which their membership of the 'moral community' normally protects them from. These forces are all essentially anarchic and outside the ordered 'moral community'.

The spirits (variously known as bhut, curail, and parī) who are said to attack women at this time are described

as those who have died violent or untimely deaths such as suicide, murder or accident, or women who have died in childbed, or were barren or unmarried when they died. Menstrual pollution and childbirth pollution (which is sometimes seen as a particularly strong form of menstrual pollution - see chapter 6) make women vulnerable to these forces while other kinds of pollution do not. This indicates that menstrual and childbirth pollution make women marginal to the 'moral community' in a way other pollution does not.

A bride and groom are also seen as being especially vulnerable to attacks from spirits. During marriage the bride and groom are not thought of as being polluting in any way. Their vulnerability seems due to their transitional state which separates them from a world where spirits are more easily controlled. At menstruation a woman displays aspects of her sexuality which have no place in the daily round of household life - hence the expression caukkebahar. She becomes marginal to the ordered world and prey to forces and beings who also have no place in the 'moral community'.[16]

Moreover the menstruating woman is not only represented as outside 'the moral community' but in contrast to the bride and groom she is represented as antithetical to it. She is at once the potential victim of a dakin and likened to a dakin (see chapter 3). Dakin are said to be able to eat children and this seems to correspond with the idea that menstruation involves a power that can destroy life. A dakin can only be a woman she is never described as a man. Many believe that this power is maternally inherited. These ideas thus represent this destructive force as entirely female and as we have seen women only have a place in the 'moral community' through their alliance with men. Female physical sexuality is thus represented not only as low status but something that is part of a conceptual sphere where the norms and roles that make 'the moral community' safe are discarded and as something that threatens the 'moral community' itself.

THE IMPLICATIONS FOR OTHER ASPECTS OF FEMALE BEHAVIOUR

As well as arguing that the pollution reflects anomalies in the structure of ideas, Douglas also suggests that '...bodily symbolism is part of the common stock of symbols deeply emotive because of the individual's experience. But rituals draw on the common stock of symbols selectively. Some develop here, others there. Psychological explanations cannot of their nature account for what is culturally distinctive. Each culture has its own special risks and problems. To which particular body margins its beliefs attribute power depends on what situation the body is mirroring. (Douglas 1978: 121). The question then arises as to whether the way in which menstruation seems to confuse conceptual categories of the 'moral community' reflects other ways in which women may threaten the community. Chapter 3 suggested that an unmarried girl might threaten the purity of caste and line but the pollution and danger surrounding married women at every menstrual period suggests they represent a continuing threat.[17]

Two writers, Lyn Bennet and Doranne Jacobson have given their attention to this problem and both their explanations focus on the problems created by the rule of exogamy, that is the problems of marrying an outsider. Their explanations differ in that Jacobson sees the dangers and pollution of menstruation as an expression of tensions in relations between affines, and so a woman's menstrual pollution represents her association with group which is somehow hostile towards her husband's kin group. Bennet's explanation centres on the problem that the inmarrying woman as an individual poses for her husband's household. The two explanations are not mutually exclusive and illustrate the complexity of trying to decipher which 'known dangers' menstrual beliefs express. It is therefore worth summarising both explanations in brief.

1. Jacobson's Explanation

Jacobson's fieldwork was done in a village in northern Madhya Pradesh which contained both Muslim and Hindus. There was comparatively little stress placed upon female pollution and menstrual taboos among the Muslims in contrast to practices among the Hindus. The Muslims practised a form of cross cousin marriage, while the Hindus did not and the pattern of exogamy was similar to that described for Ambakhedi (see chapter 2). Jacobson tried to apply the following hypothesis that 'animosity between affinally connected groups is positively correlated with fears of feminine pollution and sexuality' (Meggit 1964: 219) to her own material. She suggested that 'The Hindus who are concerned about feminine pollution take their wives from nonkinsmen and the two affinally related groups emphasise their distinctiveness in a number of ways - joking relationships and formal respect and avoidance relationships (including the veiling of women before certain affines), etc. on a number of occasions. The desires of the two groups do conflict at times over the issues of control, of the linking of females labour and company and sometimes over financial issues. The Muslims who are less concerned with feminine pollution subsume all affines into the azizdar (kindred) group and in fact many marriages are arranged within the kindred' (Jacobson 1970: 402). Thus there does appear to be a correlation between 'animosity' between affinally related groups and menstrual taboos, in that Muslims with little focus on menstrual and other forms of female pollution, do not demonstrate any 'animosity' between affinally related groups, while Hindus do.

However as Jacobson acknowledges, this argument has two major flaws. The first is that unlike the situation in New Guinea on which Meggit bases his hypothesis, the 'antagonism' between the Hindu affinally related groups only comes into existence after a marriage has taken place. The Mae Enga described by Meggit marry the people 'they hate'

and hostilities exist before marriage. This suggests that Jacobson's explanation of menstrual taboos as expressing tension between groups may need adjusting. The second problem is that South Indians are even more concerned with feminine pollution than are the Hindus of Central and North India and South Indians tend to marry cross cousins and sisters' daughters and so marriages are arranged within the kindred. Jacobson suggests that 'it is possible that certain forms of regularised hostility may exist between intermarrying clans in South India' (Jacobson 1970: 409). Again the question is raised as to whether she is right to place such empahsis on tensions between affines. The link between South and North India may well rest on beliefs about sexuality that are common in both regions, and also on the position of the woman herself when she marries into a new houshold. This is where Lyn Bennet's explanation, with its use of mythological material and thus on culturally specific values attached to the body and bodily processes helps to redress the balance.

2. Lyn Bennet's Explanation

Bennet's argument is complex and she deals with more mythological material than I have room to incorporate here; however it can be subdivided under the following points.[18]

(1) The rules for maintaining individual and caste purity are one of the ways by which the ideals of the ascetic and the householder are integrated (see above).

(2) In Nepal the Rsis are considered to be the founders of the gotras. (I found no evidence for this in Malwa). 'Since absolute ascetic impurity is impossible for the patriline as an institution, purity of descent becomes its structural equivalent' (Bennet 1976b: 188-9). This seems to imply that although members of the patrilineage as a whole cannot opt

for the ascetic way of life by maintaining the purity of their line they can express their commitment to the ascetic ideal. Rsis, as ascetics, seem to act as a kind of structural pivot providing a link between the purity of the ascetic and the purity of the lines that they founded. Schematically the symbolism can be represented as follows:

gotra = Rsi = ascetic practices

(3) Menstrual blood is symbolic of affinal women - ie. women in their specifically sexual roles of wife and mother. From the point of view of the patrilineal unit women, like menstrual blood, are at once necessary and dangerous. They must be brought in to produce the children if the lineage is to continue. At the same time women present a threat both to their own husbands individually and to the agnatic groups as a whole. (Here she is saying that women as affines are threatening, but not that the affinal group as a whole is threatening)

(4) Women are threatening in three ways:

(a) A women's sexual infidelity may endanger the purity of her husband's line (cf. arguments in chapter 3).

(b) The patrilineal unit of the joint family is always in danger from break up challenging the ideology of its solidarity. Although this need not necessarily be the fault of the women (for brothers do quarrel) women are usually represented as the divisive element and therefore threaten the patrilineal unit not only by virtue of their sexuality but also by virtue of disession within the joint family.[19]

(c) At another level women are threatening in that it is believed that a woman's sexuality can affect the life span of her husband. She cites various mythological evidence in support of this and refers to Cairstair's work.[20]

(5) Rsi Pamcami and another festival known as Tij (which unlike Rsi Pamcami is not observed in the same form in Malwa) 'expresses this dangerous and potentially divisive power of women and their sexuality and attempts through myth and ritual to reintegrate the power into the very patrilineal structures of family and kinship which it threatens' (Bennet 1976b: 195).

(6) Thus the Rsi Pamcami myth can be interpreted as follows: A woman's sexuality is believed to threaten her husband's welfare and this is expressed in the myth by the way in which the wife's violation of menstrual taboos causes both her husband and her to suffer a low form of rebirth. The wife's lack of fastidiousness is equated by Bennet with sexual looseness. This is linked to the threat that a woman poses to the patriline as follows: 'Because of their lowly rebirth the sraddha ceremony for them (which represents the spiritual continuity of the patriline) is rendered ineffective. The son's attempts to honour and feed his dead parents are unsuccessful and both the animal-parents in the myth go hungry. The Rishis appear in the myth....as protagonists for patrilineal community through ritual purity' (Bennet 1976b: 206). By following their instructions the son and his wife are able 'to send them to heaven where the son's sraddha ceremonies for them will be effective. Thus the Rishis re-establish patrilineal continuity which has been broken by female sexuality' (Bennet, ibid.).

(7) She concludes by showing how the women in the myth have accepted the restrictions placed on them by the dominant ascetic and patrilineal ideology of Hinduism (Bennet 1976b: 207). The mother demonstrates her repentance by reversing her former sin. Instead of polluting others in secret for her own benefit, she publicly pollutes the food to be given to the Brahman so that they will not be killed by poison even although she knows that she will go hungry as a result.

The daughter-in-law plays a main role in expiating her mother's sin. She goes to the trouble and expense of recooking the food after it has been defiled by the dog. If the daughter-in-law had been careless like her mother-in-law, the Brahmans would have been killed. Using other mythological material Bennet equates sexual purity with ritual purity throughout. Hence her conclusion that the ultimateregard for purity shown by the women in the myth indicates that they have accepted the dominant ascetic and patrilineal ideology of Hinduism.

Bennet's explanation then links the symbolic associations that menstruation has with life and death, and sexuality, more closely to the 'known dangers' of the society than Jacobson's does. In doing so she locates the basic tension that menstrual taboos express as that between the individual wife and her husband's patrilineage, rather than between the two patrilineages themselves.

Comment

However despite this, Jacobson's work offers a perspective that is significant. Although Bennet's subtler and more lengthyarguments are convincing, she neglects to emphasise the point that in general women as a group rarely, if ever see themselves or are seen as pitted against men in Hindu society.[21] Thus the power that they have to threaten men is not seen as a power that stems from them being women per se but stems from their position as wives, that is women who come from outside. It is the wife not the mother or sister who is painted as threatening in the myths. Informants in Ambakhedi would often describe women as tej (cunning or crafty) and they attributed this to the fact that they saw women as owing allegiance both to their natal and their conjugal lineages (see chapter 2).[22] It is as if the disruptive powers associated with women are not attributed to the animosity that women may or may not feel as a group or

individually towards men but to their unavoidable betwixt and between position.

The Mae Enga men described by Meggit really do marry the people they hate and their fear and distrust of their women seems to stem in part from their fear and distrust of the group from which they come. However the distrust of the women because 'they eat in two places' felt by men in Ambakhedi, is not so much a distrust of the place or the people from which the women come, but a distrust of women because their loyalties embrace more than one gotra.[23]

The 'animosity' between affines described by Jacobson for the Hindu situation in fact can be looked at as a way of managing the problem of the wife's dual allegiance, rather than an expression of the animosity between affinal groups as such. This would explain why it only occurs after marriage. The avoidance behaviour and veiling required of the new daughter-in-law serve to minimise any opportunity she may seek to display dissatisfaction or challenge those in authority in her new household. The behaviour required of her natal kin in the presence of her conjugal family, marked as it is by notions of avoidance, not taking gifts, again belies any feeling that a woman's family has any claims on the woman's conjugal household. Thus the kind of behaviour that Jacobson interprets as controlled 'animosity' between affinal groups can also be seen as having the function of publicly expressing the position that while a wife by definition is linked to two gotras her filiation to her husband's gotra should at all times take precedence over her allegiance to her natal family.[24]

In Malwa and the area described by Jacobson, women are seen as potentially disruptive forces. In both regions menstrual taboos among Hindus are strong, and the symbolism of menstruation is associated with disruptive female powers. In Ambakhedi at least a woman's cunningness is attributed in part to the fact that she is between two gotras. I would

argue that it is a woman's potential to disrupt that is expressed in menstrual pollution and that this power may be linked to her position in the kinship structure as it is in Malwa as well as other aspects of her sexual behaviour. Thus in re-examining the southern data menstrual pollution may or may not be correlated with hostility between affines but it will almost certainly reflect a disruptive potential that women have even if this power is not attributed to her position in the kinship system.[25] Where Jacobson's work is useful is that it highlights that 'known dangers' to society caused by women in Central India may often be the problems and tensions created by exogamous rules.

What has been said so far indicates that menstrual taboos may or may not be correlated with animosity between affinal groups but will always be correlated with the power that women have to disrupt some aspect of social life. It would seem that the qualifications that I have placed upon Jacobson's explanation lead us away from a more precise understanding of menstrual taboos to a more generalised approach. It will be objected that women can be disruptive in many societies but not all societies have strong ideas about female pollution. This is true: but I would argue that the significant variable is the basic attitudes that the society has towards bodily processes and sexuality.[26] Hindu perception of these processes would seem to make menstrual pollution a particularly apt symbol.

This idea would need further testing against other cross cultural data to pursue it in full; but it may be that the differences that Jacobson noted between Muslim and Hindu concern over female pollution represented not only the differences in the kin structure of the two groups but also the different attitudes to sexuality in the two religions. It has already been discussed how in the Hindu context, eroticism is seen as potentially dangerous unless it is

balanced by the qualities of asceticism. The idea of certain underlying attitudes concerning bodily processes being common to both north and south India might also explain the existence of concern about female pollution on both these areas despite the differing marriage patterns. Both regions share similar values and associations about bodily processes thus while the tensions that taboos about bodily pollution express may differ slightly, the idiom for expressing them is shared.

To sum up, Bennet's work which incorporates Hindu ideas about eroticism and asceticism (ie. culturally specific body associations) and uses mythological analysis to show how tensions at one level are transformed into the beliefs expressed in menstrual taboos seems more convincing than Jacobson's work. However Jacobson's emphasis on affinal tensions does indicate that in Central India at least some of the tensions between the sexes are created by the marriage patterns and kinship groupings.[27]

PERCEPTIONS OF FEMALE POWER

Menstrual taboos are associated with the dangers women pose. In seeking to understand their implications for perceptions of female sexuality it seems pertinent to ask why women do not use this threat of danger to exercise influence and power. Outside India instances have been reported where women have used this power to pollute to influence the behaviour of men. Rosaldo writes: 'In the simplest case we might note that a woman who is feared often has power; many a New Guinea man will observe his wife's wishes for fear that an angry woman will serve him food while she is menstruating or step over him letting blood drip while he is asleep' (Rosaldo 1974: 38). In Ambakhedi, women laughed at the idea of using their power in this way. When questioned more closely they expressed fear of the consequences of being involved in such an act - their own

power to harm men could in turn harm them.

A consequence of physical sexuality being represented not only as low status but outside the 'moral community' is that when women manifest this power they leave behind the safeguards of the 'moral community' and become vulnerable. Moreover their husbands are the people who give them access to the ordered world of the 'moral community' and if they harm or destroy their husbands they are placing their membership of this community in danger. The mature woman without a husband, whether she is married or a widow, has an ambiguous status and is excluded from the ritual events that bring other women honour and respect. Thus the symbolism suggests women cannot harm their husbands without harming themselves.

Ardener and others have suggested that in many societies women have 'muted models' which run contrary to the mainstream dominant ideology of society and are thus 'muted' (Ardener, S. 1977). What seems to be expressed in the myths surrounding menstruation is that the women have power but their awareness of this power is muted because the dominant model of society is expressed as one in which their existence is only defined in relationship to a man. They are mothers, daughters, sisters and wives but not women.[28] In the menstruation myths women are in danger if they endanger their husbands. The obverse of this situation are the many facts undertaken in Bhadom where the myths show how fasting and austerity on the part of a woman bring benefits not only to herself but to her children, brothers or husbands. Thus the position of the Hindu woman is not one where the definition of biological events associates her with a position where these processes make her part of a woman's world which is, as it were, autonomous from the man's.[29] Rather, in order to save herself from the danger surrounding these events she must identify her interests with those of the ascetic ideology and see her fate as intertwined with

that of her husband.

Menstrual pollution not only indicates that women threaten men (cf. Ardener, S. 1977, in the introduction) but it may indicate the particular way in which women threaten men. There are many different kinds of sex pollution. In some cultures it may be the sexual act itself which is seen as highly dangerous and/or polluting and it may be surrounded by myths about its dangers and by ritual taboos. Audrey Richards has shown how for the Bemba the difficult position of the husband among this matrilineal people is expressed in taboos surrounding the sexual act. Since it is the social union of marriage which frequently dissolves the physical union of sex is seen as dangerous. In Ambakhedi sex is mildly polluting but not seen as dangerous or linked with any ritual elaboration. Hence it is menstruation which as it were receives more symbolic focus. Rather than the joining of two sexes being represented as the point of greatest ritual danger, it is during her period when a woman is seen as dangerous, this is at a time when she is obviously not with child, but unmistakably female. This, together with the mythological evidence cited above, indicates that the dangers expressed at menstruation mirror the danger of a woman being independent and not identifying her interests with those of her husband. Thus the exclusion of women from contact with others and her vulnerability seem to associate female independence with an unpleasant state.[30] A woman removes her suhag at this time again implying that when wearing the signs of her married status she is not so exposed to danger. Women stress their own vulnerability rather than their power to harm men. Built into the menstrual taboos and beliefs is a symbolic message which seems to curb the desire of a woman for independence by making such independence seem unpleasant.

CONCLUSION

The ritual taboos and beliefs surrounding menstruation suggest that female physical sexuality not only has low status but is also antithetical to the principles that order the 'moral community'. It places women outside the 'moral community' and makes them vulnerable. Bennet's and Jacobson's work suggest that menstrual taboos reflect some of the problems that occur in a woman's incorporation into her husband's household at marriage. This incorporation is difficult because although a woman's social personality becomes identified with that of her husband she is still a being with a mind and will of her own and loyalties to her natal family. This may cause or be seen to cause a disruption within the natal household. Menstruation seems to symbolise such disruption even when the disruption is not directly associated with physical sexuality per se. The symbolic associations of menstrual blood with the erotic aspect of life and it's power to bring about death as well as life make it a suitable sensory pole to express such disruption.

The reflexive nature of menstrual danger encourages women to identify their interests with those of the 'moral community' even although they possess powers which threaten this community. Power which gives women honour and respect is associated with the 'moral community' and with women's association with men. Thus female physical sexuality is represented as an undesirable necessity to be hedged about with restrictions rather than celebrated.

NOTES

1. It is possible that the length of four of five days is not the average length of flow for a woman's menstrual period, since the answers given appear to be too uniform for it to be a biological phenomenon. Eichinger who conducted a similar survey in Tamilnad writes as follows: 'Pollution days are never distributed in Gaussian curves as would be the case if they were the expression of a biological phenomenon. In all aspects of pollution studied certain durations are clearly preferred a fact which can only occur in culturally determined phenomenon. The preferences and avoidances of certain durations have been traced to number symbolism' (Eichinger 1974: 157).

2. The question of daily bathing appeared to be linked to the status of the caste, the Brahmans and Thakurs pointed out that they, unlike other castes bathe daily and saw this as evidence of their superiority. The daily bath meant that they were always able to remove the mild pollution of sexual intercourse. Other castes simply said that although a daily bath was desirable, in theory they were too busy to take the trouble and would bathe every four or five days.

3. In addition is should be remembered that these taboos are observed in a community where there are very few Brahmans, or other orthodox high castes, so that the scrupulous concern for ritual purity shown in the matter of menstrual taboos contrasts with other areas of life where the idiom of ritual purity, although important, is not so dominant. Villagers, even high caste, were lax about many practices that would be considered polluting in other Hindu communities. The Havik Brahmans described by Harper (1964) are an example of a community where the idiom of ritual purity and pollution is more dominant. For example villagers in Ambakhedi would simply remove polluting leather shoes before entering a temple or house while the Havik Brahmans described by Harper would wash their feet as well. Eichinger reports that 'Other writers noted the lack of differentiation between the ritual level of the community involved and its observance of temporary female pollution' (Eichinger 1974: 116).

4. Again this contrasts with the more orthoprax practices of the Havik Brahman women described by Harper. They wear a small rag at all times to prevent pollution being caused by occasional vaginal discharge (Harper 1964: 160).

5. Hershman (1974) in his detailed discussion of the symbolism of hair in the region of the Punjab writes '...female hair then becomes in abstract terms a symbol of female sexuality or more concretely of vaginal and menstrual blood' (ibid. 282). In the Punjab although women do not leave their hair unbound during menstruation they do leave it unbound during other periods of severe pollution that occur after birth and death. According to Hersham this is because when a woman is polluting her hair which signifies the polluting aspects of her sexuality, becomes so polluting that to wash it before the pollution has run its course would be dangerous for the woman and for others because of the intensity of pollution. They therefore do not wash, comb or bind it at this time.

6. This contrasts with discussions about sex and childbirth which in general only take place among women who are counted as being of the same generation.

7. cf. Harper who writes 'After a girl's first menses, her menstrual cloth is buried as it is believed that should a cobra smell it, the girl would be cursed with barrenness' (Harper 1964: 160). See also chapter 3 in this thesis.

8. I am grateful to Professor Mayer for suggesting the term 'reflexive' to describe the nature of menstrual dangers.

9. These rituals are performed specifically by women for the welfare of their husbands and children. They include Savan Tij where women worship Parvati and during the first eight years of marriage undertake special fasts; and others such as Hal Chath and Hartali Tij (see Appendix 2). The myths associated with these fasts attribute to women miraculous powers over life and death brought about by the fasts they conduct.

10. Stutley describes the Rsi as follows. 'The rsi is the ideal or the 'model' by which other men are able to achieve spiritual development. In AV XII: 139 the saptarsisis (Seven Rsis) are said to be 'the primal makers of creation'. By means of ritual and tapas they brought forth cows. Various rsis or seers and their families are mentioned in the RV but in most Vedic mythology they are classed maharsis or saptarsis or primary ancestors;rajars ie those of royal lineage; brahmarsis (priestly seers) and devarsis ie. rsis possessed of such virtues as to merit the honorific 'divine' bestowed on Narada, Atri and others...The rsis of the RV may be regarded as an elite group of Vedic priestly families whose literary gifts and knowledge of Vedic lore are chiefly represented in the hymns of the RV'. (Stutley 1977: 251).

11. Villagers said that women could be divided into the following types: a satni or peaceful home loving woman (possibly this is related to the gun sattva), a laksmi one who is so good that she is like the goddess Laksmi and a dakini, a quarrelsome woman described in the text.

12. This seems to correspond with Dumont's view of impurity in Hinduism. He writes 'It can be seen that impurity corresponds to the organic aspect of man. Religion generally speaks in the name of universal order but in this case, though unaware in this form of what it is doing by proscribing impurity it in fact sets up an opposition between religious and social man on the one hand and nature on the other'. (Dumont 1972: 88).

13. According to the dharmasastra writer Manu 'oiliness, semen, blood, scurf, urine, ordure, earwax, nails, mucous, tears rheum of the eyes, sweat - these are the twelve impurities of men' (Hopkins 1884: 135).

14. The relation between the qualities of eroticism and asceticism is extremely complex (cf. chapter 3). O'Flaherty writing on this problem in the mythology of Shiva suggests 'Tapas (asceticism) and kama (desire) are not diametrically opposed like black and white or heat and cold where the complete presence of one automatically implies the absence of the other. They are in fact two forms of heat, tapas being potentially destructive or creative fire that the ascetic generates within himself, kama the heat of desire. Thus they are closely related in human terms, opposed in the sense that love and hate are opposed, but not mutually

exclusive. Nevertheless their apparent opposition on certain levels is often taken as the starting point for a series of mediations within the myths and as such tapas and kama are dynamically opposed, acting against one another in spite of or (rather because of) their innate similarities' (O'Flaherty 1973: 35).

15. I am using the word 'anomaly' to mean irregularity (see concise OED 1951).

16. This seems to follow from a general pattern that characterises spirit possession cross culturally for Lewis writes that in general spirits are 'dissociated ...from the overt social norms of the communities in which they figure so frequently as sources of affliction' (Lewis 1971: 86).

17. In discussion I leave aside psychological explanations of Indian menstrual taboos while admitting they may provide what Piaget has called the 'emotional energetics' of the situation. An example of a psychological approach to the analysis of menstrual taboos is provided by Kakar's work. He writes that in Indian thought and mythology woman as mother is regarded with ambivalence: 'she is both nurturing benefactress and threatening seductress. The image of the 'bad mother' as a woman who inflicts her male offspring with her unfulfilled ominous sexuality is not just a clinical postulate, supported by mythological evidence; it is indirectly confirmed by the staunch taboos surrounding menstrual blood and childbirth all over traditional India' (Kakar 1978: 93). This kind of explanation is outside the framework of my interpretation but not necessarily incompatible with it.

18. At this point the methodological issue is raised as to how appropriate it is to consider an analysis that relates to a myth that is not identical with the one known locally in the region under study. In connection with this the following points should be noted: (a) The myths are very nearly identical. (b) The kinship structures of the two regions to which the myth seem to be fairly similar. (c) O'Flaherty writes 'This technique employed by the mythologist is justified by the theory that it is simply the mirror image of the technique employed by the myth-maker in the first place. Leach compares a myth with a message transmitted over a great distance (in time and space) and therefore

repeated several times with different wordings, so that when the different versions are reunited 'the mutual consistencies and inconsistencies will make it quite clear what is really being said'. The mythologist is merely reassembling what the culture as a whole has fragmented' (O'Flaherty 1973: 17-18).

19. It is not clear whether women always are the cause of breakup within joint families. See discussion in chapter 2.

20. I found no specific evidence on this point in Ambakhedi but as mentioned in note 9 there were many beliefs womens fasts could secure the long life and health of the husband. This is perhaps the obverse of the beliefs described by Bennet, a positive virtue of their relationship to men as opposed to the negative aspect expressed in fear of their sexuality.

Harper's discussion of fear of women among Havik Brahman is also worth mentioning here. He suggests that in general groups of adults who lack power and prestige, who generally do the bidding of others and have minimal control over their own fate are likely to be portrayed as dangerous and malevolent. 'Also the roles of women as mothers, daughters and sisters contrast sharply with their roles as wives or as women in general. Thus it seems possible that a man who dominates his wife but also sees her in the capacity as mother to his children could feel a contradiction; and as one of the early attitudes towards women that he learnt was respect for his mother, this is basic enough to cause him concern over his secondarily acquired feelings towards women as wives' (Harper 1969: 93). Hence possibly another cause of the fear of women's sexuality by men.

21. For example Fruzetti (1975: 56) cited in the introduction, suggests that, 'the relations between male and female (in India) may not be contrary or contradictory or oppositional'. She stresses that the relation between male and female worlds is one of complementarity. Kakar writes 'As in other patriarchal societies one would expect the preference for sons over daughters, the cultural devaluation of girls to be somehow reflected in the psychology of Indian women. Theoretically one possible consequence of this kind of inequity would be heightened female hostility and envy towards males, together with a generally pronounced antagonism between the sexes.

I do not have sufficient evidence to be categorical yet my impression is that these phenomenon do not in general characterise the inner world of Indian women. The dominant myths for example unlike say A Thousand One Nights, show little evidence of strain between the sexes and as I have shown elsewhere, aggression occurring between members of the same sex is significantly greater than between members of the opposite sex in India' (Kakar, S. 1978: 59).

22. Leela Dube also sees certain strategies adopted by Indian women as the product of a kinship system which results in a patrilineal patrivirilocal joint household. She writes that while in a matrilineal utorilocal joint household '...women who are living together have also grown up together; thus there is a continuity in their relationship. They belong to the same group and have rights over the productive resources. They do not have to change their loyalties; nor do they come with different training and traditions from separate backgrounds. In such households age and kinship status are effective sources of authority. The tenor of life is characterised by greater smoothness and informality in relationships and the notions of subordination are absent. In the patrivirilocal setting manoeuvering, manipulations, feigned affections with undercurrents of jealousy and rivalry, and backbiting tend to become a part of intra sex relationships and family life as such' (Dube 1978b: 7).

23. Given that I am right in attributing the threatening aspects of female behaviour not to the fact they come from hostile groups but to the fact that they are interstitial between two groups the following comment by Mary Douglas seems to be relevant: 'In these cases the articulate conscious points in the social structure are armed with articulate conscious powers to protect the system; the inarticulate unstructured areas emanate unconscious powers which provoke others to demand that ambiguity be reduced. When such unhappy or angry interstitial persons are accused of witchcraft it is like a warning to bring their rebellious feelings into line with their correct situation. If this were found to hold more generally, then witchcraft defined as an alledged psychic force could also be defined structurally. It would be the anti-social psychic power with which persons in relatively unstructured areas of society are credited...' (Douglas 1978: 102). Women in Ambakhedi are not often brought back into line through accusations of witchcraft but the myth and festival of Rsi Pancami can be interpreted as having parallel functions.

24. The situation of the Hindu daughter-in-law in northern India seems to have parallels with the position of the daughter-in-law in Mongolia. Here, according to Caroline Humphrey strict naming taboos and rules of personal behaviour operated and were 'an ideological and practical means of preventing the defection of younger men. One facet of this is the enforced submission of sons so that they do not demand early division of the property' (Humphrey, C. 1978: 105).

25. An example of a society where there are strong notions of female pollution but the power of women to disrupt is not located in her interstitial position in the kinship system is the Hazda. Here the main principle in the organisation of the division of labour is the between the sexes. Not only is a wife considered polluting during menstruation but her husband observes a kind of menstrual couvade. 'Male competition for wives', 'female collusion between mothers and daughters to exact the maximum of trade goods from husbands in return for grudgingly given sexual satisfaction' (Douglas 1970: 133) make for the 'insecurity of a man's hold on his wife' (ibid.). The man's menstrual couvade and the pollution associated with menstruation in general is a kind of claim the man 'affirms regularly by asserting the physiological connection between himself and his wife and the widespread dangers of disregarding it' (Douglas 1970: 134).

26. This can be illustrated by returning to the article by Meggit on which Jacobson based her hypothesis. In addition to looking at the correlation between affinal relations and menstrual pollution, Meggit also looked at the quality of the relations between the sexes which he specifically states are not necessarily a direct result of animosity between affines. The two New Guinea peoples that he takes to illustrate this point are the Mae Enga and the Kuma. The Mae Enga have elaborate taboos concerning female pollution, the Kuma do not. '...We must discriminate between at least two kinds of intersexual conflict or opposition - the Mae type and the Kuma type. The one reflects the anxiety of prudes to protect themselves from contamination by women, the other the aggressive determination of lechers to assert control over recalcitrant women' (Meggit 1964: 221). In one situation, that of the Mae Enga, women always give deference to men, and 'in the sexual field women proceed from a restricted and perforce chaste adolescence to a similarly constrained marital condition, for not only do bachelors shun

sexuality but married men also fear their 'skins' are rarely given to erotic adventuring' (Meggit 1964: 220). The Kuma in contrast exist in a society where sexual conquest is far more obvious. Thus in the Kuma situation attitudes to sex and sexuality are more open and sex becomes part of a power game connected with the prestige of men among men. In this context there are no menstrual taboos, and the fear of sex which characterises the Mae Enga situation is absent. The implication of this may be that menstrual taboos will serve as symbols of dangerous female power where sexuality itself is seen as something dangerous and fearful since menstruation is closely associated with sexuality. Where sexuality does not have this connotation then perhaps there are less likely to be strong menstrual taboos.

27. Here I would agree with Dube when she writes 'In viewing sex roles in the context of the family embedded in kinship, it is not assumed that either family or kinship are autonomous. As Maurice Bloch says '...the selective value of kinship is precisely the combination of the many functions it can perform without it being reduced either in character or in time to any single one' (1973: 87). Where it is an important organising principle its consideration helps us to understand the distribution of rights to strategic resources and their actual control and use. See Maurice Bloch, 'The Long Term and the Short Term; The Economic and Political Significance of the Morality of Kinship' in Jack Goody (ed.) The Character of Kinship, CUP Cambridge 1973' (Dube 1978b: 10, n. 2).

28. By this I mean that women as a group seldom act together on behalf of defined female interests (cf. Chapter 2). Bujra commenting on a study by Sharma of a village in North India sums up the situation as follows: 'Within the extended household the older women have seniority over those more recently arrived. The power that the older women have over younger women is derivatory - it stems from the relations of the older women with the senior males in the household. Women labour in the fields but the product of their labour is controlled by the males who own the land. Women thus lack independent access to productive resources and are divided among themselves. Not surprisingly, in this situation, they fail to develop any solidarity (Bujra 1978: 15).

29. Obviously no women's world is ever completely autonomous from the world of men but in some societies such as the Bakweri described by Ardener, S. (1977) women have relatively greater autonomy over powers which are specifically female. Perhaps one of the most marked examples of this kind of 'autonomy' occurs among the Mende and Shebro peoples of West Africa. Hoffer describes how Mende and Shebro women's societies elaborate and stress the significance of woman's ability to give birth in the public rituals that they perform. This is done to such an extent that the women chiefs of these societies can use their power to initiate women as a political weapon in struggles with male chiefs. (Hoffer 1974). This contrasts with the position of women described here where female processes connected with reproduction seem dangerous even for the women involved.

30. The parallels between menstrual taboos and the results of being an outcast may serve as a symbolic link between the social ostracism that may result if a woman is unfaithful to her husband or runs away with a man from another caste (see chapter 3 for an example of this).

CHAPTER 5

THE MARRIAGE COMPLEX[1]: ITS RELATION TO WOMEN'S RITUAL STATE

> A marriage in this form transforms an immature girl under the authority of her agnates into a wife and potential mother within the control of her husband's kin. In moving from one family to another a bride brings with her new sets of relationships for her affines and in the transmutation of her own status from mere daughter to daughter-wife there begins a new traffic between two groups of agnates of which she is seen as the vehicle.
>
> (Freedman 1970: 180)

Freedman wrote the above description about Chinese marriage but it could well be applied to Indian marriage. It encapsulates the complexity of transformations marriage involves and the implications. It also illustrates a bias that occurs in many analyses of marriage. This is, that in general the main focus of attention is the relationship created between 'two groups of agnates' (Freedman op. cit.) rather than the change that occurs in the status of a woman herself.

This happens because marriage rituals are multi-dimensional[2] in their functions and symbolism. It would be difficult to devote due attention to the relations between wife givers and wife takers at the same time as looking in detail at the 'transmutation' of a woman's status. The change in a woman's status is of course embedded in the relationship between the two groups of agnates, and an analysis of what marriage rituals indicate about this relationship can also indicate something about the kind of status change that a woman undergoes.[3] However by shifting the focus so that marriage is analysed in terms of

its function as a rite-de-passage for the individual, new perspectives emerge about the nature of a woman's new found status. Thus what follows is not a holistic explanation about every aspect of the marriage complex, but rather sheds some new light on an old problem.

As Chapter 3 indicated it is marriage that makes men and women full members of the 'moral community'. Analysis of marriage as a rite de passage reveals how this social maturation is accomplished and suggests the nature of the powers that are associated with socially mature women is what I have called social sexuality. The nature of these powers becomes apparent not only in what happens to the bride and groom at marriage but also in the powers associated with married men and women who are involved in the marriage rituals in other capacities.

Chapter 4 demonstrated how women's ambiguous position in the kinship system and its destructive aspects are reflected in the taboos and beliefs surrounding the manifestation of female physical sexuality at menstruation. At weddings the positive aspects of dual filiation are celebrated in terms of their association with the renewal and hence continuity of the groom's gotra. These are symbolically linked not to a woman's physical sexuality per se but to alliance between kin groups and the powers women acquire at marriage.

TYPES OF CHANGE AT MARRIAGE

Van Gennep suggests that marriage rituals in any culture involve several kinds of status change. For analytic purposes the kinds of change occurring in an Indian marriage can usefully be divided into three.[4] The first concerns what Van Gennep has called 'social puberty' (Van Gennep 1960: 55). He describes rites of social puberty as concerning 'separation from the asexual world and they are followed by rites of incorporation into the world of sexuality and in

all societies and all groups into groups confined to one sex or the other' (ibid.).

In chapter 3 the difference between the ritual domain of married and unmarried women was demonstrated. In this chapter I shall show how the ritual domain of married women seems based on their possession of a kind of meta-sexuality related to but distinct from mature physical sexuality. Kumari do not belong to an asexual world in the strictest sense in that their powers are distinctively female and they have some association with fertility, however they do not have the powers associated with socially mature women. It is this passing from social immaturity to maturity and the nature of the powers the women acquire that seems to justify borrowing Van Gennep's phrase 'social puberty' to describe one aspect of status change at marriage.

The second kind of status change concerns what Van Gennep has called 'rites of individual union' (Van Gennep 1960: 116). Again as was discussed in chapter 3, marriage makes a woman part of her husband's social personality (cf. Gupta 1974: 55). Thus 'rites of individual union' also seem applicable to some aspects of the Hindu marriage rituals. The third kind of change concerns the transfer of a woman between one household and one kin group and another (cf. Van Gennep 1960: 118). Connected with this is the setting up of a new relationship between wife giving and wife taking groups and, as I will show below, some of the marriage rituals seem more to do with marking this new relationship than with the transfer of the bride as such.

Any one rite may have a function and meaning that concerns more than one kind of status change but most rites seem primarily concerned with one particular aspect of the status change and so, by identifying which aspect a rite is most concerned with, the meanings of the rituals become clearer. Throughout, rites will be discussed from the perspective of the mechanics of status transformation.

SOME ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT THE SACRED

In understanding how these status changes take place it seems useful to review the theoretical standpoint taken in analysing ritual which was first set out in chapter 1. It was suggested that what is sacred consists of 'a realm of objects and practices recognized to be different from the objects and practices of everyday life' (Mair 1965: 198). This 'set apart' category bestows society with an 'axiomatic taken- for-granted cognitive quality' (Das 1976: 247). The variation in what is classified as sacred at different times in any one society reflects the way that events, people and objects threaten the order of conceptual categories. In brief, making something sacred is a way of making an ambiguity less threatening. Within Hinduism states of extreme purity and extreme pollution are ways of managing different types of ambiguity. Where confusion occurs because principles are antithetical to the principles that order the conceptual system the event or person may be defined as polluting and hence dissociated completely from the 'moral community'. Chapter 4 presented evidence which showed how this occurred with respect to menstrual taboos. States of extreme purity seem to involve an individual being in a liminal or transitional state which involves principles which are not antithetical to the 'moral community'. In the case of marriage individuals become sacred not because of the forces with which he or she is associated are antagonistic to the 'moral community' but because the transition or liminality itself results in a confusion of categories which has to be managed if the categories themselves are to retain validity.

Van Gennep argued that because rites de passage involve an individual changing from one status to another all have a similar underlying structure that manages the liminality involved. The rites have three phases 'separation', 'transition', and 'incorporation' (Van Gennep 1960: 11). The complex set of rituals described below have this underlying

structure even although some phases may last days or sometimes even years while others only last minutes. The making sacred of an object or person ie. it's 'consecration' serves to set it apart or separate it from its normal state; hence the rites of consecration described below serve as rites of separation. The bride and groom are 'consecrated' and it is then that the substantive changes leading to their change of status take place. De-consecration, - the rites concerned with removing the special status held by the bride, groom, people and objects during the marriage period are a way of marking the end of liminality and re-incorporating individuals and objects into everyday life. Such rites thus serve as rites of incorporation. The contrast with the liminality which occurs at menstruation and menarche is that this liminality is identified with good sacred forces and is viewed as auspicious. In the interpretation of marriage rituals which follows, as well as suggesting the particular aspect of status change which particular rituals involve I have also noted whether they are concerned with separation, transition or incorporation so that the overall structure of this set of rituals can be discerned and the symbolic implications made clearer.

THE MARRIAGE COMPLEX: AN ANNOTATED DESCRIPTION

What follows is an account of the wedding rituals of the dominant caste - namely the Purviya Rajputs. Most weddings in other castes did not differ significantly from the Rajput pattern. I have included details or appended footnotes where the patterns of weddings of other castes differ greatly. The account is detailed and is divided into the subheadings, description and comment and this makes the whole description rather lengthy. However it seems important to let some of the ethnographic evidence speak for itself and to show in detail how I have arrived at labelling various sections of the wedding rituals as phases of separation, incorporation, etc., and to provide a reference point for the arguments I make at

the end of the chapter and in chapter 8.

Despite this form of presentation it will become obvious that at times more could have been said about certain rituals. What is discussed is the result necessitated by the inordinate length otherwise involved. The features chosen for discussion are those which pertain most directly to arguments presented in the final section of this chapter, and in chapter 8. These deal with the nature of social puberty and social sexuality, and with the way that women's dual filiation is presented in marriage symbolism, and the differing ritual duties of men and women.

SAGAI: ENGAGEMENT[5]

Description: This takes place in the bride's village anything from a number of months to a number of years before the wedding takes place. The length of time between the sagai and the actual wedding depends on the age of the bride and groom when the engagement is contracted.

This is the ceremony that publicly marks the association between the bride and groom. Before this time all negotiations and agreements are informal.[6] The ritual essentially involves the father-in-law of the bride placing gifts in the bride's lap. A party of men arrives from the groom's village including the groom's father, other members of the groom's household but not the groom himself. Then the bride, dressed in a red sari with a white oversari is led out of the house by the Nai woman. She sits on top of a quilt which has been placed over a white pattern drawn with flour known as a cauk. A small girl dressed as Ganesa (see chapter 3) sits beside her.

The groom's father washes the bride's feet in milk and water and then puts a tīkā (ie. the tilak, an auspicious red spot) on her forehead and places a garland round her neck. He then puts a tika on a ball of jaggery and puts it in the girl's lap; and then a tika on a coconut and some coins which he puts in the lap of the kumari representing Ganesa.

Finally he presents the bride-to-be with a brass tray containing clothes, some big silver anklets and some sweets. Anklets are always given at the engagement and the sight of a young girl wearing these anklets generally signals that she is engaged.[7]

After the ritual a small gift is usually sent together with a coconut and one rupee to the groom but there is no formal presentation ceremony.[8] After the sagai and every year until the wedding a girl receives gifts of clothing from her fiancé's family on Rakhi and Holi. These gifts are known as tyohārī. The bride's side will send the groom a coconut and some coins.

Comment: This rite which centres on the head of the groom's household putting gifts into the lap of the bride seems to be about the acquisition[9] of the girl and particularly her fertility by the groom's kin group. (I shall discuss below the symbolism of the lap and its association with fertility in the final section). The appropriation is not completed at this point, rather it is a rite of separation - the girl is marked out by the groom's family and enters a transitional phase, which may last for several years.

LAGAN PATRĪ

Description: This occurs in the bride's village six weeks to a month before the actual wedding rituals. The Brahman checks the horoscope of the bride and groom and an auspicious time for the wedding is fixed. This is done in the presence of the bride's father and the groom's father. The information is written on two copies known as the lagan. One copy goes to the groom's village, the other stays in the bride's. Generally the lagan is kept in the temple until the installation of the bride/groom at bānā baithana (see below).

Comment: This ritual has the effect of marking out the members of the household. Once the lagan has been written the members of the households involved must keep away from houses where people have died recently and they may not attend funeral feasts although these feasts are not in themselves associated with pollution. The sacred forces associated with weddings must not come into contact with the inauspicious forces associated with death.[10] This seems connected with the auspicious nature of social sexuality, which unlike physical sexuality does not have connotations of death.

HALDI MAHURT: THE CRUSHING OF TURMERIC

Description: This occurs in both villages some time between the writing of the lagan and the installation of the groom. Five married women annoint a pestle and mortar with vermillion and then use it to crush the turmeric pods into powder that will be used in the wedding rituals. Although ground turmeric is available in the bazaar and is used daily in the preparation of food, informants said that even if they did not have time to crush all the turmeric in the traditional way and had to buy it ready ground, they would always crush a little in the old way and add it to the turmeric from the bazaar for the purposes of the wedding.

Comment: The turmeric is consecrated and this is particularly important; for while turmeric is used normally in daily cooking without regard to any special effect it may produce, the turmeric used in weddings is thought to endow the bride and groom with the ability to produce children.[11] Thus this marking of the turmeric as sacred seems to separate it off from its daily use.

GANESA PUJA (Only found among Rajputs)

Description: Ganesa is the god often worshipped at the beginning of enterprises[12] and he is worshipped at several points during the wedding complex. However it is only among the Rajputs that he is worshipped in the bride's village by the groom's father at some convenient point after lagan patri and before bana baithana. As at the sagai the groom's father presents the bride with clothes and makes an offering of a coconut and some coins to a small girl who represents Ganesa.

Comment: This again marks the girl as having a special connection with her future husband's kin group and is another part of the phase of separation.

LAGAN LENA: RECEIVING THE LAGAN

Description: This occurs in both villages some fifteen days before the groom leaves his village for the bride's. The mother of the bride/groom goes to the temple and worships the gods and fetches the lagan. It is then kept in a clay pot somewhere in the interior of the house.

Comment: This seems to be the first of several rituals which marks out the house (ie. the physical building) as sacred. After the receiving the lagan more and more objects and people within the house are marked as sacred and the house becomes a place where powers can be invoked to bring about the change in status of bride and groom.

GANESA PUJA

Description: This too occurs in both villages. Later in the day after the lagan has been fetched from the temple, nine married women make eight figures of Ganesa out of wheat and flour and one other figure known as pind. They then put these figures on a quilt that has been

placed on a cauk and worship them by annointing them with rice and vermillion. After this they put them into the lap of the mother of the groom/bride who goes and puts them near the clay pot with the lagan in it.

Comment: The woman who acts as the mother need not be the true mother of the groom/bride. Mayer (1973: 230) comments that she should be a married member of an agnatic group but provided she is senior to the bride and groom, in the cases I observed it did not seem to matter to which group she belonged. I observed cases of mother's brother's wives taking this role and also of married elder sisters.

Reasons for someone other than the true mother taking this role may be that the true mother is a widow and is therefore considered inauspicious or that a girl's mother's brother is performing the marriage since this is considered a particularly meritorious piece of work. Whoever takes the figure of Ganesa into her lap acts as the mother of the groom/bride throughout the rest of the wedding rituals, and when the groom/bride's mother is referred to in descriptions below it should be taken to refer to this woman rather than the true mother of the bride or groom. The implications of 'real' mothers being excluded on the grounds of inauspiciousness or someone other than the father of the bride giving the bride were referred to in chapter 1 and will be discussed below.

The nine married women (and these are always women whose husbands are alive) are known as khvāṅsī. Generally they are described as being bahan-beṭī (sisters and daughters) which means they are sisters and daughters of the patrilineal group involved. This definition is not always strictly adhered to and in some instances they are classificatory sisters or close friends of the family from other castes. The husbands of khvansi are known as khvāṅsā and also play an extensive part in the wedding rituals. They are also commonly referred to as jījā (ZH). The significance

of the identity of the khvansi will also be discussed below.

KHAL MITTI: MISCHIEVOUS EARTH

Description: This takes place in both villages almost immediately after the rite of Ganesa puja. The mother of the spouse goes with nine khvansi and one khvansa to a spot just outside the village where the family traditionally goes for this ritual.

The mother purifies the spot with cow dung and places a betel leaf, some turmeric powder and some vermillion on the spot. The khvansa then digs a little of the soil up with a pick axe and puts it in the lap of the mother who gives it to the khvansi who carry it home in baskets they have brought for the purpose. Later it is used to make the small mud cooking stoves used in preparing food for the worship of the clan deities (cf. Selwyn 1979: 687).

Comment: Like the rituals of lagan lena, and Ganesa puja, khal mitti involves the consecration of the house and members of the household themselves, as well as objects within the house. Interestingly, the Jatav draw a line in turmeric around the house at this point and refer to it as 'closing the house' (ghar band karnā) so that the function of these rituals in consecrating the house is made more obvious.

The mother of the groom/bride and the khvansi are marked out for the first time at this point and as we shall see below they have a crucial part to play in the wedding rituals. The khvansi are never honoured in the way that the mother of the spouse is, but they are entitled to eat and keep the sweet cakes that are made at the time when the flour Ganesa figures are made, indicating their special position.

The consecration of the earth at khal mitti is significant since this is later used to prepare food offered to the gods. It seems significant that the mother of the groom/bride

and nine other married women have such a crucial role in this process and I shall argue below that this is due to the powers they have that could be called social sexuality.

It may be noted that the process of separation is gradual. It commences with the engagement ritual which merely links the girl with her future family. Then, after the lagan has been written, the household is dissociated from forces that are connected with death. Then a series of rites which consecrate objects and individuals for the special role that they will have in the wedding rituals are performed. This culminates in the installation of the groom/bride (bana baithana) which I shall now describe.

BANA BAITHANA : INSTALLATION OF THE GROOM/BRIDE

Description: This takes place when the party have returned from the khal mitti and occurs in both villages. The khvansi prepare a cauk and place a folded quilt on top of it. Then the groom/bride comes into the room with his/her mother standing directly behind him/her with her right hand on his/her right shoulder. A khvansi puts out her hand and assists the groom/bride to sit on the quilt. Then each of the nine khvansi in turn places a spot of vermillion on the groom's/bride's forehead and also annoints a coconut that the first khvansi places in the groom's/bride's lap. After this the khvansi feed the spouse with betel nut. Then they feed him/her sweets pushing them towards his/her mouth and drawing them away so that it becomes a game to see if he/she can eat them.

Five khvansi then play another game known as ācchat pācchat. First two married women each take a winnowing fan. In one fan there is some parched rice and a gold necklace while the other fan is empty. The two women sit cross legged opposite one another and toss the rice and the necklace from one fan to another five times taking care that the two fans do not touch one another. In the process the chaff and small

stones mixed with the rice are winnowed out. After this a second pair of women repeats the process and finally the last woman does it single handed. The rice is used to prepare food that is offered to the gotra deities - this rite again seems to be primarily about consecration.

BANAULĀ

Description: This ritual is repeated nightly until in the groom's case the barat leaves the village and the bride's case the barat arrives in the village. For it, the groom/bride walks in procession around the village accompanied by a party of women from his/her household who sing and carry lanterns. Just before he/she re-enters the khvansi worship him/her by annointing him/her with vermillion and performing a puja with lights known as artī[13] in front of him/her.

When this has been completed the women who have been involved usually sit and sing and dance together with women invited from other households. (Men do not stay for this part of the evening). The dances are performed by either single women or women in pairs. The songs sung on these occasions may be hymns to the gods or songs about the life of a woman in her married household.[14]

Comment: As the term bana baithana (the seating of the groom/bride) suggests, it is in the above rites that the groom/bride him/herself is consecrated. After this time he/she ceases to do any work and wears fine clothes. The groom always wears a yellow shirt. Bride and groom are not left alone after this time for their liminal state seems to make them vulnerable to havā - that is to the influence of evil spirits. Although unlike menstruating women there is no indication that they are dangerous to others. The liminality does not threaten the order of the 'moral community' in the same way.

The banaula, the nightly procession through the village is a further indication of the spouse's liminal status. It is significant that the spouse is worshipped outside the

house each night. The spatial symbolism suggesting strongly that the special status of spouse depends on his/her liminal status.

Most of the rites that occur in the next period are rites of transition, the spouse, having been separated or marked off from his/her normal status in the transitional phase, undergoes certain substantive changes.

HALDI SNAN KARNA: THE TURMERIC BATH

Description: This occurs the day after bana baithana and each successive day until the central wedding rites. At a prearranged time the Nai woman is called to the house and prepares a paste of turmeric and water from the turmeric prepared in haldi mahurt (see above). The groom/bride then removes all his/her clothes except for a loin cloth to cover the genitals. Girls approaching puberty will also keep their breasts covered. The Nai woman then massages them all over with turmeric paste and it is considered important that turmeric is rubbed all over the body. Once this has finished the groom/bride washes him/herself in hot water. This is only sufficient to remove the particles of turmeric paste left on the surface of the skin and so on the days leading up to the wedding the skin acquires a golden sheen which is considered attractive. The Nai woman is paid in grain for her services and leaves.

Married women then smear turmeric on one another but it is considered unlucky for unmarried girls to touch it and young girls who try are severely scolded. If the Nai woman is not available, or the family is poor or untouchable the khvansi themselves will give the groom/bride his/her turmeric bath. However informants told me that on no account must the mother of the bride/groom rub turmeric on him/her. It seems that it is the explicit association of turmeric with sexual fertility that makes it inappropriate.[15]

Comment: Informants consider that a wedding without the turmeric baths would not produce children. This together with the strict prohibition on unmarried girls applying it to themselves or each other suggests that here we are dealing with an aspect of status change that concerns sexuality in some way and distinguishes the bride from unmarried girls. The nature of this change will be discussed in the final section.

GOD JHELNĀ: FILLING THE LAP

Description: The period after bana baithana until the construction of the marriage booth (the mandap) may last from five to fifteen days depending on the dates which have been determined as auspicious by the Brahman. As we have seen during this time the spouse performs banaula each day and is bathed in turmeric.

It is a time of busy activity within the household. The men make frequent trips to the bazaar in Indore to purchase goods needed for the household and the women prepare food stuffs such as flour and spices that will be used at feasts given for wedding guests. The bride and groom are exempt from this work and spend the days resting, gossiping with friends and relatives and having their hands and feet elaborately painted with henna.

Several god jhelna rituals (cf. Mayer 1973: 228 bānā jhelnā) also occur during this time. For this the groom/bride is invited to the house of families who have a special relationship with their household. Married women place sweets and grains in his/her lap and may also prepare special food for him/her.

Comment: This kind of ritual seems simply to emphasise the marked sacred status of the bride and groom at this time.

MANDAP GĀRANĀ: THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE MARRIAGE BOOTH

Description: This occurs in both villages some five to fifteen days after bana baithana and before the central wedding rites. The mandap is usually built on the verandah outside the house immediately in front of the door into the house. First the father of the spouse and the Brahman performs a puja to Ganesa on the spot where the mandap is to be constructed. Then four khvansa prepare the bamboo poles[16] for the four corners of the marriage booth and the khvansi tie small bundles of betel leaves and rice onto the poles. The Lohar (the Iron smith) brings a small figure known as the mānak khamb and inserts it in one of the holes where one of the poles will go.[17] The khvansi then smear the poles and the holes made for them with turmeric and vermillion and the khvansa then construct the marriage booth by using the four poles as support and then making a roof of the branches from mango trees.

Comment: The construction of the mandap involves the consecration of a special space where the most important rites concerning the transfer of the girl from one gotra to another and the personal union of bride and groom will take place. It is as if by this stage all the house is sacred but the space under the mandap is especially highly charged. It is useful in this context to envisage the sacred as something which varies in its degree of intensity.[18] The house, once marked in this way, becomes the setting for a series of rituals which involve the deities of the gotras concerned.

It is not clear why the khvansa have a special role in constructing the mandap where the deities of their wive's natal gotra will be worshipped. Selwyn (1979: 689ff) suggests that this is a way that wife taking males (ie. ZH) honour the wife giving group by providing this special service. However in Malwa unlike the region studied by Selwyn the difference in status between wife-giving and wife-taking

groups is not pronounced and Selwyn's analysis does not seem to fit very well. It may be that something else is being expressed about the khvansa's special link with his wife's gotra. He seems to have this role with regard to it not because he is a member of a wife taking group of males, for in this case the sister's father-in-law might be called on to perform such a service. Rather it is his personal union with his wife which gives him his special role with regard to her gotra. I shall argue below that just as a married woman is auspicious for her natal gotra, because her arrival and departure in this household do not have the overtones of death and dispersion that a woman may have for her conjugal gotra, the khvansa is, by extension, used to mark auspicious kinds of change which occur in the natal gotra. This point will be explored in more detail in the next section.

GOTRA PUJA

Description: The exact details of the puja performed at this point differ from caste to caste and family to family. They involve wives of agnates, or the daughters or sisters of agnates cooking food under the mandap on the stoves that have been made from the mud from the khal mitti ritual, and using some of the rice that has been winnowed in the acchat pacchat game. Usually pūrīs (wheat cakes cooked in oil) and khīr (a mixture of milk and rice) are prepared. Members of the gotra, the daughters and sisters of the gotra and in some castes their husbands, then worship the gotra deities under the mandap. They offer them some of the cooked food and sing a song that may include some of the names of the ancestors. Then worshippers eat a meal together made of the food that has been prepared for the ancestors. The same people then go inside the house and worship the gotra deities again by offering them more food and also grains that are later ground and used to make flour for food used later in the marriage rituals.

Comment: Van Gennep suggests that in rituals meals normally symbolise union between those who share food (Van Gennep 1960: 29). Here the worship and meal create a link between living members of the gotra who have come together to celebrate the wedding and ancestors. This marks out the members of the gotra as an action set which has come together for a purpose. By linking the activities of the ancestors to the living group, the rituals that take place under the mandap - the transfer of the girl between groups and the personal union of bride and groom are set in the context of the continuity of the gotra. Progeny and the continuity of the gotra are one of the most important aspects of the marriage in classical Hinduism (see for example Gupta 1974: 55).

The gotra is, on this occasion, usually represented by all the adult men and women of the spouse's household, and other members of the agnatic descent group of the same generation as the spouse's parents and those a generation older who live in the village or have arrived as guests by this stage. The inclusion of the sisters and daughters reflects their filiation to their natal gotra. The inclusion in some, but not all, castes, of the khvansa seems to reflect a kind of complementary filiation that these men acquire by virtue of marriage. The children of sisters and daughters are not allowed to participate in this puja indicating that uterine descent, is not the defining principle, the tie between a married woman and her husband is more important.

Women's preparation of the food seems significant for, on some public occasions men prepare food. It may be that there is a parallel between the cooking that women do at this point and the way that their general importance in the gotra is not so much in terms of their representation of continuity of descent, rather, they provide 'nourishment' in terms of children and new relationships etc. This echoes Fruzetti's argument described in chapter 1 where she argues

that women have nurturing functions providing wealth and children for the more enduring structural elements of the gotra represented by men. In chapter 8 this aspect of their relation to the gotra will be considered in more detail.

UKEDI PUJA : RUBBISH PIT PUJA

Description: Early in the morning on the following day the mother of the bride/groom and the five khvansi go to the spot where the family deposits its rubbish. The bride/groom mother puts some cowdung and a coin there and draws a swastika shape in vermillion on a small area of soil near the pit. The khvansi then place these things, including the soil, in the lap of the groom/bride while covering his/her eyes with their hands. These things are then taken inside the house and placed near the lagan and the objects used in the gotra puja. Special songs to invoke the ancestors are also sung at this point and another puja to the ancestors is performed.

Informants in some castes said that they placed the soil from the ukedi puja near the sweets that had been prepared for the wedding. They explained this practice by saying that in doing so the sweets would become like the rubbish- never ending.

Comment: The invocation of the ancestors and the emphasis on the never-ending aspect of rubbish suggest, in this case, the objects used in marriage are being associated with the continuity of the lineage that marriage will bring about. It seems significant that it is the groom/bride's mother, ie. the mother of the person who is becoming an adult member of the community, who has an important role in this. It also seems significant that she purifies[19] what would normally be classified as a polluting spot - the rubbish pit, and then places the purified substances from this pit near objects to be used in the wedding. The reclassification of impure as pure suggests not only that all objects connected

with the marriage are now in a sacred liminal period where ordinary classifications are laid aside; but also that through agency of the mother of the spouse a substance like rubbish can bring continuity to the gotra. Here dirt ceases to be dirty but retains the potency associated dirty (the never ending quality) in the way that birth and sex will lose their polluting qualities but become metaphors for the creation of a social persona within the marriage rituals to be described below. This rubbish unlike ordinary rubbish has a place inside the house and this parallels the way that as I shall demonstrate social sexuality unlike the physical sexuality evident at menstruation has a place inside the 'moral community'.

Up to this point preparations in the bride and groom's village run in parallel except for certain things such as the writing of the lagan which is only done in the bride's village. The next sequence of events concerns only the groom's village as it involves the preparation of the groom and the party (bārāt) that will accompany him to the bride's village. Many of these events are later paralleled in the bride's village when she is prepared to meet the groom.

MĀMERĀ: GIFTS OF THE MOTHER'S RELATIVES

Description: This is the presentation of gifts of clothes made to the parents and siblings of the groom. Gift givers include the groom's mother's brother, the brothers, fathers and mothers of the groom's brother's wives. They are taken round the village in a procession with the drummer at its head and followed by the Nai carrying gifts on a large brass tray with the donors following behind.

Comment: The implications of gift-giving at this point are not entirely clear. The term mamera connotes a degree of consanguinity with it's associations with uterine descent. As Mayer suggests 'It is significant that the

gifts made by an affine like a wife's brother to his sister's husband are called mamera; for the term itself indicates the relationship which the wife's brother will fill after a few years when he becomes mother's brother to the children' (Mayer 1973: 232). Kin through marriage are seen as being in one category (mausal) and it is their relation to mothers of the patrilineage's children which makes them belong to this category rather than belonging to a group which will give wives to the spouse's lineage over several generations.

In contrast, Dumont argues that the distinctive nature of the gift givers is that they are wife givers as opposed to the wife takers. They are contrasted with the wife takers who give gifts at bān (see Dumont 1966: 92 and below). His point seems to be that the principle epitomised in this prestation is the relation between wife-givers and wife-takers and not one to do with uterine descent.

These interpretations are linked with a debate concerning whether relations within and between kin groups in north India are primarily governed by principles of alliance or descent and the arguments are too lengthy to discuss here, (see for example Mayer and Dumont op. cit. and Schneider 1968a).

However, it does not seem unreasonable to suppose that principles of both consanguinity and affinity are being expressed at this point; that is that relations between wife-givers and wife-takers are expressed not only in the identification of a group which provides wives but also by symbolic recognition that in providing wives this group also provides children for the other group. Mamera is given on the birth of a couple's first child which seems to lend support to this idea. Also if the concept of marriage as a meta-birth for bride and groom is accepted, the groom/bride's brothers' wives stand or can stand as 'mothers' to the spouse. Therefore gifts from their brothers can be thought of as gifts of the mother's brother in this metaphorical sense. These are speculations but illustrate the difficulties in coming to a final conclusion about what

this prestation expresses, and illustrates a point made above that marriage rites are multi-dimensional.

PRĪTI BHOJ: LOVE FEAST[20]

Description: On some occasions the groom's father gave a feast directly after mamera, on other occasions it was given after ban (see below). The timing depends on how far the barat will have to travel and the catering arrangements the family has made etc. Wealthy families try to invite the whole village and generally hire Brahman cooks from the city so that the village Brahmans and Thakurs will accept food from them. Other families may prepare the feast themselves or ask caste mates to help them in which case the number of guests will be more limited and castes known not to accept pakka food from them will not be invited.

Comment: This then involves the groom's family in displaying ties at local village and caste level: it is perhaps an indication that the wedding, involving as it does a change for the household and gotras concerned, also affects the wider community of which they are a part. The new daughter-in-law will be a daughter-in-law, at least in a classificatory sense, to the whole village and will be expected to observe the veiling restrictions she observes before her own father-in-law, before all older men within the village. As Van Gennep points out, residence, as well as kin groups may be involved at weddings (Van Gennep 1960: 113). Here the role of village is minimal but the feast given has the affect of displaying the groom's links with it.

The next four rites tel cardhānā (to annoint with oil), janeū denā (to give the sacred thread), gatha bāndhanā (to tie the thread) and dulen kā taiyār (the preparation of the groom) are concerned with preparing the groom for the departure of the barat.

TEL CARDHANA: TO ANNOINT WITH OIL

Description: The khvansi draw a cauk under the mandap and place a quilt on top of it. The groom wearing only a loin cloth comes and sits on it with the pot containing the lagan placed at his feet. Then nine khvansi each annoint the pot and then the groom's knees and shoulders with oil ten times. Then they repeat the process with turmeric paste. After this a khvansa lifts the groom off the cauk and the women then massage him with oil. (Some informants said that from this time on the groom should be carried everywhere, but usually the age and size of the groom precludes this).

JANEU DENA: TO GIVE THE SACRED THREAD

Description: The groom dressed only in a small loin cloth is lifted back under the marriage booth. One of the khvansi covers the groom's eyes with her hand; then each of the nine khvansi puts a little of the soil collected at the ukedi puja into the hands of the groom. The groom takes this and throws it backwards over his head and then he is rubbed in a mixture of oil and turmeric. Finally the groom's mother draws a line in vermillion powder in the shape of the sacred thread (the janeu) across the groom's body.

Comment: The use of turmeric in these rituals suggests again that a transition concerning the social puberty of the groom is taking place at this point. The transition seems to be expressed by the image of rebirth. The groom is virtually naked and should be carried like a small child. The term janeu used to refer to the line of vermillion drawn across the groom's body is also used to refer to the sacred thread that signifies the second birth of those castes who perform the upanayan ritual. This birth however, unlike physical birth, is not polluting. The transformation of a polluting event into a non-polluting event seems emphasised by the use of the rubbish pit soil from the ukedi puja, at this point.

The implications of this second birth and the role of the spouse's mother within it will be discussed in more detail at the end of the chapter.

GATHA BAMDHANA: TO TIE THE THREAD

Description: At about this time the women of the household prepare the white sari that will be given to the bride and that will ultimately be tied to the groom's loin cloth. They tie a small piece of betel nut, a coin and a piece of iron into one corner. They explain this by saying that these substances ward off evil spirits. Both ends of the sari are dyed in a mixture of turmeric and water.

A new cauk is then made under the mandap and the groom is again lifted on top of it. (The khvansa who does this will be paid R1.25 by the head of the household for this service and the giving and acceptance of this fee may be the subject of playful bargaining). The groom is then wrapped in the orange sari that he will give to the bride and nine khvansi hold an orange cloth over his head. Into this cloth they tip some roti which they then toss up into the air by shaking the cloth. A khvansa then takes some yarn and winds it seven times round the hands of the women who are standing in a circle holding the cloth. He then lifts this and the cloth off their hands and puts the cloth to one side. He rubs the thread in turmeric paste so that it becomes yellow and then ties it to the wrist of the groom after having tied seven knots in it. The khvansa then dips the ends of the loin cloth that the groom will tie to the bride's sari in turmeric. Finally he completes this ritual by lifting the groom off the quilt and taking him into the interior of the house.

Comment: The groom now seems to be in his most transitional phase and it seems it is in this transition that makes him vulnerable. Both Gupta (1974: 81) describing

a wedding in south east Rajasthan and Pandey (1969: 212) using classical sources refer to a thread being tied to the wrist of the group for protection from evil spirits at this stage. As I have argued previously evil spirits seem associated with a liminal position on the part of those whom they attack.

The elaboration of this ritual suggests that there is more to its symbolism than the tying of a protective thread and a detailed analysis of it would take some time. However certain features do seem notable. The groom, having undergone a sort meta-birth where his mother played a crucial role, is almost immediately wrapped in the sari of his future bride suggesting that his personal union with her plays an important part in the transition he is undergoing. The roti thrown into a cloth and then tossed above his head are tossed under the mandap which is closely associated with gotra deities. The groom's transition seems implicitly associated with the production of food for these deities. Given the prevalence of turmeric in this ritual this food seems linked to fertility and the production of children. The seven times the khvansa circles round the groom with the thread seem to foreshadow the seven times that the groom will circle the sacred fire with his bride in the phera ritual and again the use of turmeric links this to the power to produce children. The groom's social puberty is thus represented as linked to marriage, and to the production of children for his gotra.

DULEN KA TAIYAR: THE PREPARATION OF THE GROOM

Description: A khvansa assists the groom to dress.[21] Nowadays most grooms choose to wear a suit and leather lace-up shoes emulating the costumes of prosperous city dwellers. They may either wear a simple Gandhi cap on their heads decorated with tassels and tinsel, or an elaborately decorated turban bought from the bazaar. A few grooms favour the traditional costume of their caste - long red gowns with

elaborately domed hat constructed of straw.[22] They may also carry a sword.

While this is going on the groom's mother uses a flour and water paste to draw a square on the wall in an inner room in the house. This is usually the same room in which the lagan had been placed and where members of the gotra worshipped the gotra deities after they have been worshipped in the mandap. In the Gari caste the worship of gotra deities inside the house involves the mother drawing such a square at that stage rather than at this one, however, among the Rajputs the groom's mother draws the square while the final preparations are being made for the groom.

The mother then prepares a little rice and ghi and when the groom is ready he puts his hand in this mixture and makes hand print in the square. The groom's mother then offers the groom a little rice and ghi to eat. Finally the khvansa annoints the grooms eyes with lamp black.

Comment: In the previous ritual the groom was associated with giving food to the gotra deities under the mandap outside the house and now he is associated with giving food to an image which is identified by informants as Mai Mata, the mother goddess of the gotra. The Mai Mata worship is prepared by the groom's mother who prepares food for the groom to offer to his image. The groom's mother then feeds the groom himself with some of this food. This sequence suggests the role that the mother of the groom has in providing 'food' in the form of children for the gotra and the special role of the groom who gives food to the gotra deity but is also given some of this same food by his mother indicating his identification with the gotra's deity. Worship at this square is one of the more significant rituals that the groom will perform when he brings his bride into his new household as will be shown below. His identification with the gotra is linked to his bringing a wife to it.

It was suggested in chapter 2 that the term gotra has connotations which make it a symbol of the unilateral descent group ie. the khandan or bhaibhandh even although strictly speaking it refers to a group which is a reference group only. Here the worship of the gotra goddess in the very interior of the house seems to make the gotra a symbol for the ghar (the household) as well. The ghar is the smallest grouping of gotra members and the one that will be most tangibly affected by marriage of one of it's members. The solemnity of the Mai Mata ritual inside the house is perhaps in part an expression of this.

Mayer has suggested that Mai Mata, the gotra goddess represents agnatic groups in a different way than the gotra god ie. the kul devata. The latter is a great traditional god Bheru, an aspect of Siva. Each gotra member owes allegiance to a particular shrine of Bheru, so that the members of a given lineage in a given locality share worship of the Bheru of a particular shrine. Mai Mata stands for the gotra in the widest sense and Bheru for the local lineage group (see Mayer 1973: 192) in a more defined sense. The appearance of Mai Mata as opposed to Bheru in the marriage ceremonies may be because the gotra goddess is a more flexible symbol for the number of different levels at which the gotra is altered at marriage, ie. that of gotra in the widest sense, of khandan or bhaibandh and of ghar. Bheru represents a more specific group and is not so flexible a symbol.

BAN

Description: Ban is the presentation of money by the groom's agnates and others to the groom (cf. Mayer 1973: 223; 231). The groom sits fully dressed under the mandap and a tray is placed at his feet. A drummer may be called to summon the donors to the marriage house. Next to the groom sits the Brahman, Nai, or other literate man with a book

which he notes down how much each person gives. This is so that the groom's father can return the same amounts at weddings in the donor's family (see Mayer op. cit.). He may use the cash at the time of the wedding to help defray large scale expenses; but since he must ultimately repay the money the presentation seems analagous in function to a rotating credit system. - Although the presentation of money is made in a tray at the groom's feet, the money is in fact destined for the groom's father.

Comment: Like mamera and the feast given by the groom's household these rituals seem to reaffirm the ties of the groom and his family with the caste and local community. As noted in the comments on mamera Dumont considers that it is significant that such people should be considered as wife-takers and the gift giving by them at this point emphasises this shared aspect of their identity (see Dumont 1966 op. cit.).

NIKĀSĪ: THE LEAVING

Description: This is the groom's ceremonial leave-taking of his home and village to go and fetch his bride. The procession that occurs when he leaves his house seem to be a culmination of the bānaula that have taken place on the previous nights. The groom comes out of the house and his sisters place a tika on his forehead. His mother then attempts to breast feed him. The groom breaks a coconut in front of a horse that has been prepared for him to mount. Then he mounts the horse. One of the groom's elder brother's wives then holds the reins and refuses to let them go until the groom's father has given her some money. The groom, accompanied by men holding lanterns, and often someone holding an umbrella over his head sets off round the village. The procession is accompanied by a drummer and women of the household who dance in front of the groom's horse. At various points the procession stops and people from the nearby houses come out and pass money over the

heads of the dancers to give it to the drummer. Eventually the procession stops at the temple of Ram where the groom makes obeisances to the gods. After this the groom and the barat (the marriage party) may leave the village. However if, as often happens, the nikasi takes place late at night and the village of the bride is some way off the marriage party and the groom spend the night in the temple before leaving for the bride's village early the next morning. At all events the groom does not return to his own house after nikasi.

The barat comprises male friends and relatives of the groom and its size varies according to the wealth and popularity of the family concerned. No women go with the barat (although older informants said that previously this had been so among certain castes such as the Gari). The practice had ceased because it was considered 'shameless'.

Comment: This rite seems to mark the way in which the groom is separated from his family and household so that in his transitional state he can achieve 'individual union' with the bride. The practice of the mother symbolically breastfeeding her son seems to be an extension of the image of rebirth noted earlier, and to reflect the food she has given her son in front of the image of Mai Mata. The implications of the groom offering the coconut to the horse are unclear but coconut is one of the most common things offered to the deities and the simplest explanation is to suggest that this is part of the consecration of the horse who will take the groom in his liminal state to the village of his bride.

Mayer has suggested that the role of the elder brother's wife in holding the reins may be the 'paying off' of this woman who has theoretical 'lien' over the groom in case of her widowhood (Mayer pers. comm.). I knew of no cases of levirate and the villagers never referred to it even as idealized practice. Mayer has pointed out that there is

no levirate in the Malwa although it is practised in other parts of India (Mayer 1973: 221) and he found as I did that many informants said that she was to be considered as a mother to her husband's younger brother. If this is so rather than paying off the woman for renouncing her rights over the groom one is reminded on the other occasions when the father-in-law of a woman gives gifts of money to his daughter-in-law. These are when she brings water to the house as a newly arrived daughter-in-law and when she brings water to the house for the first time after she has had a baby. This associates this prestation with the coming of a new person and new life into the household and it may be this that is figured in this exchange at nikasi especially if the preparations of the groom do reflect his 'birth' as an adult member of the gotra.

The groom's obeisances at the temple of Ram which is the main village temple in the upper and middle caste neighbourhood suggest that he is making obeisances to the gods of his village in general having already worshipped the deities of his gotra. His village and his gotra are the two groups whose membership will change in the transition brought about by his marriage.

THE MOCK MARRIAGE

Description: With most of the men of the households gone with the barat there is a tradition that the women left behind should amuse themselves by holding a mock wedding ceremony. This is a pastiche of the real events that take place and involves the marriage of two women, with the accompaniment of many boisterous games and somewhat lewd songs. However I only observed this mock marriage once in the house of the Nai family. I never saw a Rajput or Gari version of these games because, although informants from these castes recognised that such games were sometimes played. At the marriages I attended the women were too exhausted by this

stage to organise such an event and contented themselves with resting and gossiping and occasionally calling neighbours in to sit and sing and dance. This trend was further exacerbated by the fact that it was common for many weddings to be held in particular weeks considered auspicious, so that while one household's barat was away the women of that household would seize the opportunity to attend the wedding festivities of other households. In addition, since it was also popular for several marriages to occur at one household at the same time, it often happened that after the barat of the household's groom had left, members of the household left behind had to prepare for and take part in rituals involving the bride(s) of the household and the barat(s) coming to fetch her (them).

Comment: Given that it is often left out, the mock marriage does not seem to play a very significant part in the marriage rituals. Selwyn has suggested that such games are 'presented by men at least' to justify a view that women, left to themselves are 'by nature', hot, wild, and disorderly' (Selwyn 1979: 687). A view more in line with the Van Gennepian framework used above might be that the women of the bridegroom's household are at this point like the groom himself, in a liminal phase, and that this liminal phase results in suspension of the rules that normally govern the behaviour of women. This is particularly marked since men are not there to enforce these rules. - Holi is another festival in which, as Marriot (1966) has shown, the rules of normal conduct are transformed and disorder results; but here both sexes are involved. Given that liminal phases in rites of passage often seem to result in the suspension of rules that normally govern behaviour, and that while here it is only women who are disorderly, at other times men are involved in 'wild and disorderly' games, Selwyn's interpretation of the event should be treated with caution.

BARAT MILNA

Description: When the barat arrives in the village it is usually greeted by the Brahman who makes a tika on the forehead of the groom and other members of the barat. The groom's party then generally proceed to either the Ram temple or the Siva temple and wait there. The bride's father then goes to greet the groom and washes the groom's feet in a little milk. The barat rests for a little and is brought food by members of the bride's household. The barat is usually accompanied by a band which plays for most of the time, and richer households may also organise a display of dancing and/or fireworks at this point.

After this the groom's father approaches the mandap with the lagan of his son. He places it on the quilt that has been placed beneath the marriage booth and then it is taken inside the house by the mother of the bride, who touches it to her forehead as she picks it up.

Then the groom approaches the marriage booth and touches its roof (the toran) with his sword. He then returns to the temple where he waits with others of his party.

Comment: These rituals seem to mark the relationship that the groom is to establish with his bride's kin group. In Ambakhedi there was no special significance in the temple in which the barat wait, they are quite simply the largest collectively owned convenient buildings. Among low castes the barat gathers at the large area by the well and shrine to Sitala Mata in that particular area of the village.

The washing of feet with milk might be construed as the groom's father demonstrating his inferior nature of his position of wife-giver as compared to that of wife-taker but since hierarchy between wife-givers and wife-takers was not strongly pronounced in this region the more likely interpretation is that the groom is an honoured guest. Water is often brought to wash the feet of honoured guests who

arrived in a household after long journeys. The fact that in this case it was milk not water that was used suggests the purity and quasi-deity status of the groom at this point.

The touching by the groom of the mandap with his sword seems a violent image suggesting that in some way the groom is destroying or taking over an area that has previously been consecrated to the deities of his future wife's gotra. This may suggest the appropriation he will make of one of the members of this gotra in marriage.

GOD BHARĀĪ: TO FILL THE LAP

Description: The groom's father presents clothes, sweets, and jewellry to the bride by placing them in her lap, The clothesare those that the bride will wear for the main part of the wedding ritual. To receive them the bride sits underneath the mandap and as at the sagai is accompanied by a young girl who represents Ganesa.

Comment: Here it seems to be the bride's association with the groom's patrilineage in the person of the groom's father, that is singled out, as at the engagement ceremony which it parallels in many ways. It seems significant that it follows the groom's touching of the mandap with his sword for in both cases the appropriation of one member of a gotra by the groom's side seems to be demonstrated.

After this the bride is prepared by performing the same sequence of rituals, ie. the tel cardhana, gatha bamdhana and lārī ka taiyar (the preparation of the bride) that the groom performed earlier. The details parallel the rites performed by the groom with one or two small exceptions. Obviously the bride's dress is different, she wears the traditional full skirt (gagara) made of the most expensive material the family can afford with a red over sari and on top of this the white turmeric dyed sari sent by the groom's

family. At the end of these preparations she is taken inside the house and seated in front of an image on the wall representing Mai Mata but in this instance rather than the image being an empty square as it was in the groom's house, the square has been filled in with the figures of two men on horseback and other designs such as the sun on the moon. This is usually drawn by the bride's mother some time on the day before the arrival of the barat. The girl them sits quietly waiting while certain other rites take place outside the house.

Comment: Rebirth is the image used to express the bride's changing status at this point as it was for the groom but the bride's rebirth takes place under the mandap after members of her husband's gotra have entered this space. She is dressed in clothes provided by the groom and so her social maturation takes place in the context of her husband's gotra as well as her own. She does not offer food to the image of Mai Mata while she is waiting for the groom to come inside indicating that her relation to her natal gotra which she is about to leave is different from the groom's. It is interesting that in gatha bamdhana roti are put in the cloth over hear head and tossed into the mandap. If the previous interpretation about this being some kind of offering of food to gotra deities is correct it would suggest that the bride is offering 'food' to her gotra deities even although she will not produce children for them. However again it should be noted that this only takes place after the groom has symbolically entered into this place with his sword suggesting the association of his gotra with that of the bride's.

LAGAN: THE AUSPICIOUS TIME

Description: In the lagan patri described above not only was the auspicious day for the wedding rituals calculated by looking at the horoscope of bride and groom but also the auspicious moment for joining together the hands of the

bride and groom. (This usually seemed to be in the small hours of the morning). Just before this time a khvansa goes to summon the groom from where he has been waiting in the temple. He then comes to the bride's house accompanied by a khvansa from the barat. At the entrance to the house he is greeted by the mother of the bride who touches his head with the following objects: a roti, some cow dung, a lentil pounder, a churn and the yoke of the bullock cart. The groom then enters the house and goes into the room where the bride is sitting and then sits down beside her on her right. A Brahman chants Sankrit verses and ties the end of the bride's sari to a loin cloth which the groom wears draped over his shoulder. After this, to the accompaniment of a small girl who sits behind the bride and groom clinking coins, the Brahman places the horoscopes of the bride and groom in the bride's hand and at an auspicious moment puts the groom's hand over them. In some marriages I observed this was done by a khvansa and not a Brahman and the recitation of sacred verses was omitted.

Bride and groom then worship Mai Mata by putting a little rice and ghi on various parts of the image (this has been prepared a little earlier by the bride's mother on the special stoves made to prepare all wedding food). Then the bride and groom eat a little ghi and rice. After this the couple may separate and rest a little before the phera rite is performed later in the morning; or they may go immediately to the mandap where the phera rite will be performed at once.

Comment: When asked about the significance of the objects which the mother of the bride touched the groom's head with, some informants suggested that these objects were all those encountered daily in married life. It would seem that this greeting not only demonstrates the personal link that the groom is forging with the bride's family but also

reflects the fact that marriage marks the beginning of the householder stage of a man's life.[22]

It is possible, as Mayer suggests (pers. comm.) that the objects may symbolise specific aspects of the dimension of the individual union of the couple, rather than or as well as the entry to the new āśrama. One of the literate Darzi women had obtained a book from the bazaar which gave the meaning as follows:- the dal pounder is a symbol of quarrels and fighting and these should be part of married life but born with patience. The churn symbolises that movement and upheaval are necessary to create a family. (Mayer comments that the pounder and churn are often used in discussions about sex and although I was never aware of such metaphors being used it is possible that in some cases there are in which case the pious interpretation of the book has a somewhat interesting gloss!). The yoke is used to harness oxen together to pull a car and thus symbolises the joining together of husband and wife. No explanation was given for the presence of roti or cow dung but these symbols seem to suggest commensality the fact that marriage will make a man and a woman's personal purity more closely interlinked.

The taking of the hand and the tieing together of clothes seem to be rites of 'individual union'. It is interesting at this point that the presence of the Brahman is not deemed absolutely necessary and that a khvansa may join the hands. The groom gave food to his gotra goddess before leaving his village but he and the bride only give food to the bride's gotra goddess after they have been symbolically linked together. Thus the bride only makes an offering to her natal gotra goddess after the groom has done this and after she is joined to him. Her links with her natal gotra deity are thus expressed in terms of her union with her husband. Moreover the groom not only offers food to the bride's Mai Mata image but also eats this food afterwards. As I will show below marriage seems to give him some kind of special filiation to his wife's gotra and later he may

worship gotra deities at the marriage of her siblings. This worship of the bride's gotra's goddess seems to prefigure this.

PHERA

Description: This ritual seals the union between bride and groom (cf. Mayer 1973: 229), it takes place under the mandap outside the bride's house and in all cases except that of the untouchable castes involves the presence of a Brahman reciting sacred verses. In Ambakhedi there was only one Brahman, so since marriages often took place simultaneously in different families, Brahmans would be hired from the city or from neighbouring villages where the caste was more plentiful. The exact nature of the phera rite seems to depend in part on the Brahman who officiates but the same basic elements are present in all the ceremonies. A quilt is placed under the mandap for the bride and groom to sit on, and a small table is placed in the centre of the mandap on which are placed various objects and images representing the gods. A sacred fire is lit in front of this table by the Brahman.

The bride and groom sit on a quilt in front of the table - the bride sits on the groom's right. While the Brahman recites mantras the bride and groom make offerings to the deities of such substances as jaggery, ghi and rice and milk.

Then the bride and groom perform the phera by walking round the fire seven times. Before each circumambulation a small boy stands in front of the bride and groom with a winnowing fan full of grain in his hands, and tips a little grain into the cupped hands of bride and groom. While walking the bride and groom have their clothes tied together and for the first three times round the bride leads and for the next four times the groom leads. The couple end the rite by sitting on the quilt and making offerings to the gods but this time the groom sits on the bride's right.[23]

Comment: Classically the worship of the sacred fire and the phera are seen as the god Agnī (god of fire) witnessing the union of the bride and groom and it seems that this ritual is the culmination of the rites that result in the individual union of the bride and groom.[24] Among the Jatav, as if to indicate the inappropriateness of the women's family watching this union which has implicit sexual implications, no members of the natal family are present during the phera.

The ritual indicates the nature of this union in other ways. The presence of the small male child tipping grain into the joined hands of bride and groom suggests the importance that children, especially small male children have for the couple. In addition the change in the wife's position seems indicative. She begins on the right side of her husband - ie. his superior side and begins by leading but ends by sitting on his left side, by following him. Her union with him involves subordination and dependency on him and this is reflected in the rituals which take place. Some of the verses which the Brahman recites during the phera take the form of vows which bride and groom make to one another, the bride and groom assenting to what is being said on their behalf. The emphasis on the promises that the bride makes is that she should obey her husband, and so her acceptance of subordination.[25]

KANYĀ DĀN: THE GIFT OF A MAIDEN

Description: Although the title of this ritual refers to the giving of the girl herself at the lagan, colloquially is used to refer to the later presentation of gifts by the bride's father and members of her household to the bride.[26] These gifts are the dowry[27] that the girl will take with her to her new household. Theoretically they are made to her rather than her in-laws or groom for in the event of separation she should be able to claim them back.

Depending on his wealth the father of the bride will give a variety of gifts, usually comprising of brass utensils for the kitchen and a bed. In some families it is customary for the bride's mother to give her a cow. These gifts are all displayed under or near the mandap.

SIVCAUNI

Description: When the bride and groom are again seated under the mandap members of the bride's household approach and drop gifts of money and smallpieces of jewellry into a brass tray that has been placed in front of bride and groom. The money is usually taken by the bride's father and used to provide jewellry for the bride. The gifts are usually referred to as sivcauni.

BAN

Description: Then the bride's agnates and others drop gifts of money in a tray placed at the feet of the bride and the groom. As in the case of ban given in the groom's village the Nai or some other literate man notes how much money is given. As with ban given in the groom's village the money is destined for the father of the bride/groom, in this case the bride's father to help him defray costs of the wedding.

After the presentations the khvansi smear all the assembled male guests with turmeric paste and make necklaces of fruit and vegetables for them to wear. Then the bride goes with the groom to the temple (in many cases she is carried by a khvansa) and the groom's father makes another presentation of sweets and coconuts into her lap. She then returns to her parent's house to rest.

Comment: The name kanya dan suggests the separation of a woman from her natal family. The gifts given to her by her father and the sivcauni while expressing her link with this group also mark her as separated from it, the recipient

of gifts rather than just another member of the household.

The presentation of sweets into her lap by her father-in-law also seems significant. Where before he presented her with gifts while she was sitting underneath the mandap in her parent's house, now he makes gifts to her while she is in the temple, a place that has been defined as belonging to the groom's party for the duration of the wedding. The temple seems to represent, literally, a half-way house between the bride's house and the groom's village. The bride has not yet been received fully into the groom's village and so is still the object of gifts from her father-in-law. Once she is fully received her low status as daughter-in-law makes it rare for her to be the object of such gifts. Spatial symbolism is thus important in expressing the stages of the bride's incorporation into her conjugal home.

As far as the presentation of ban is concerned the comments made about the identity of gift-givers of ban in the groom's village apply equally to the group which give ban to the bride's father in her natal village.

PRITI BHOJ: LOVE FEAST

Description: The bride's father then gives a feast to the groom's party and invites other caste mates and villagers.

PAHAVĀRANĪ

Description: Gifts of clothes are then made by the parents of the bride to members of the groom's family. These are formally presented under the mandap.

Comment: Again the giving of gifts by the bride's side to the groom seems to reflect the way in which the bride is given to the groom's family, and the relation that is set up between the two groups by this gift.

The next set of rites concern the bridal couple's formal leave-taking of the bride's home.

MANDAP BARSĀNĀ: TO RAIN ON THE MANDAP

Description: The groom returns to the mandap and throws sweets on it and the khvansi again rub turmeric paste on the clothes and beards of the assembled guests. The groom then returns to the temple.

Comment: The groom's action in throwing sweets on the mandap seems part of the process by which the mandap is made less sacred again. Normally mandaps for weddings in the hot season are left standing until the arrival of the rain cools them. The groom's 'showering' of them with sweets seems to be the first stage in this cooling process. Sweets are always given after events associated with happiness and auspiciousness; women give them to each other after singing evenings held to celebrate the birth of a baby or some other celebration. The groom's showering the mandap when he leaves contrasts with the way in which he entered it by touching it with his sword. The groom's entry to and exit from the woman's natal household is thus associated with auspiciousness.

DAHLĪ PUJA: THRESHOLD WORSHIP

Description: The bride comes out from inside the house and marks a swastik with vermillion on the doorway or the house. Weeping copiously and loudly she is escorted to the place where the barat has assembled ready to depart. As she walks through the village, her older female relatives and brothers come and put their hands on her head and say their farewells. Previously when going to the temple to receive gifts from her father-in-law she was carried by a khvansa but at this stage she walks.

Finally she leaves with the barat usually in a specially painted bullock cart. Occasionally the groom's party hires a jeep.

Comment: These rites represent another stage in the separation of the bride from her natal family and village. Below I discuss in more detail the nature of the ties a woman retains with her natal family (see also chapter 2) and in particular what the dahli puja conveys about a woman's ritual state with regard to her natal family.

The weeping is significant because older women actively encourage brides to weep. Girls who do not are considered shameless and overanxious to leave their parents. In fact at this stage they will only spend a few days in the groom's household ardwill usually be accompanied by a khvansi, or possibly a younger sister from their own home so the leave taking is not final. However the fact that whatever a girl may feel she is actively encouraged to display grief suggests that it is a way of allowing public recognition of the woman's strength of feeling for her natal family.

THE ARRIVAL OF THE BRIDAL COUPLE

Description: When the bridal party arrives in the groom's village they rest in the temple until a party of women come to escort them to the groom's house. The women make a tika on the bride's forehead and then escort her and the groom to the house. The groom leads and the bride follows with her sari tied to his loin cloth. At the entrance to the house the groom's mother greets the couple and touches the groom's head with the same series of household items that the bride's mother touched his head with when he entered the bride's house. The couple then step over a series of specially drawn cauks in the courtyard and approach the door of the house itself. Here the groom's

sister demands money from the groom which he gives her and the couple enter the house.

In the Nai caste there is a ritual where the women pay to see the bride's face for the first time since marriage but this did not seem to occur in the Rajput and other castes where I observed the marriage.

Comment: These rites all serve to incorporate the bride into the household and gotra of the groom and to re-introduce the groom into the household in his new role as married man. Thus the couple wait first in the sacred liminal area of the temple and are then introduced into the house. The groom's mother's actions parallel those performed by the bride's mother earlier and seem to emphasise the new role of the groom as householder. The role of the sister of the groom in this reintroduction will be discussed below.

MAI MATA PUJA

Description: The bride and groom perform a puja to Mai Mata by worshipping an image which the groom's mother has drawn on the spot where the groom made a handprint just before leaving (see dulenka taiyar). This Mai Mata puja is similar to the one performed in the bride's house. Bride and groom put a little rice and ghi on various parts of the picture and then each of them eats a little rice and ghi - the groom feeding the bride and then the bride feeding the groom.

Comment: This puja again seems to bring into prominence the female deity of the gotra and the importance of the gotra in the wedding ceremony as a whole. The food eaten by the bride and groom which has first been offered to the image of Mai Mata seems to reflect their union with the gotra as personified by Mai Mata, and also their union with each other.[28]

OBEISANCES TO THE GODS

Description: The bride and groom accompanied by the khvansi then visit every shrine and temple in the village and at each make a small offering of a coin and a betel leaf. In the course of this worship the bride and groom will visit the Bheru shrine which is specific to the gotra of the groom and if the shrine is not in the groom's village itself, then the bride and groom make a visit to it as soon as it is convenient.[29]

Comment: Thus at her formal entry to the groom's village the bride is introduced to the female deity of the gotra - Mai Mata - the male deity of the gotra Bheru and also to the deities of the village (see above for comments on the different aspects of gotra membership these deities represent).

GAME PLAYING

Description: Next a number of games are played by bride and groom. Kaṁkaṁ dora (the untying of the thread) consists of the bride and groom untying with one hand only, the thread that was tied to their wrists during the wedding. A khvansi then puts the threads, together with a small metal ring, into a bowl of water and bride and groom compete to see who can pick out the thread when both put their hands in the bowl together. Whoever wins is thought to be the strongest partner in the marriage. Ekī bekī is a guessing game involving bride and groom guessing the number of sweets held in the hands of the khvansi.

Variations on the games played at this point seem to occur from caste to caste and sometimes from gotra to gotra. Other common practices include one where bride and groom have to dip their hands into a small model grain bin and say out loud whether it is full or empty. They are encouraged to say

that it is full for this means that the household will be blessed with children and prosperity.

Gupta suggests that such games present an opportunity for the bride and groom to get to know one another and overcome their shyness (Gupta 1974: 94). However although in the situation described by Gupta, the games are played in the girl's natal household, here they are played in the girl's conjugal household with the khvansi watching. It should be noted that once the marriage rituals are over husband and wife are discouraged from showing any signs of their relationship in the presence of others. These games are perhaps not so much an opportunity for the bride and groom to get to know one another but rather are a way of displaying a relationship that must be incorporated into the life of the household and normally will not be displayed publicly at all.

TEL UTĀRNĀ : THE REMOVAL OF THE OIL

Description: Bride and groom then bathe to remove the turmeric, oil, and janeu that was drawn on their bodies earlier. This marks the end of the day's events and after this bride and groom retire to sleep separately.[30]

Comment: At this point the rites of individual union, social puberty and the transfer of the bride from one kin group to another are more or less complete except for the consummation ritual (ano or gauna) to be described below. The removal of the oil and turmeric from the bodies of the bride and groom suggests that, the transitional or liminal phase being over, the bride and groom lose their highly charged sacred status.

FOOT TOUCHING

Description: The following day the groom returns to his bride's village alone and touches the feet of members of her natal family.

Comment: This practice is not carried out by castes where wife-taking gotras are seen as superior and distinct from wife-giving gotras; where it does occur it seems to indicate the new relation of the son-in-law to his wife's family - a point I shall return to below.

THANDĀ KARNĀ: THE COOLING (groom's home)

Description: Rites of cooling are performed by women in both the bride's and groom's village and concern the cooling of all objects used in the marriage rituals. The bride stays for a few days in her husband's home and then goes back to her natal village. Before leaving she goes with her mother-in-law and some khvansi to the family well. Here she cleans the brass trays that have been used in the pujas throughout the wedding. She and her mother-in-law then pass a piece of cloth between each other five times and then they both worship five kumari. Finally the bride draws water and presents it to the head of her household. After this she returns home.

Comment: In this way the objects that have been marked as sacred for the duration of the marriage become profane. (Most domestic rituals end with some form of thanda karna, the most common form of ritual being to put the objects used in the ritual down the well). Mother-in-law and new wife seem to indicate, in worshipping the unmarried girls, that the special status that both had during the wedding is over. The newly married wife shows that she is no longer a kumari, by herself worshipping kumari for the first time. (Her social puberty is thus seen as being complete). For the first time also she performs a menial service, that of bringing water for her husband's family. I shall suggest in the chapter on birth that this is a sign not only of the fertility she brings to the groom's family but also of her ability to dissociate polluting aspects of her sexuality from life in her conjugal household and associate this aspect of her life with her purer powers ie. those associated with her social sexuality.

Water, a purifying substance is instrumental in keeping the two apart.

THANDA KARNA: THE COOLING (bride's village)

Description: Before the return of the bride to her natal village her mother performs similar rites to those described above but in them she is assisted by a khvansi rather than the bride herself. She concludes them by bringing water for her family.

Comment: These conclude the wedding rites as such but the marriage complex is only finally completed with the consummation of the marriage and the rituals surrounding the birth of the first child. I will describe below the details of the consummation ceremony; the details of the birth rituals and how they relate to the marriage complex will be found in the next chapter.

ANO: THE CONSUMMATION CEREMONY

Description: This occurs when both families consider the girl is physically and emotionally ready to leave her parental home and live in her in-law's home. Women who had been married before puberty reported that in general this was one to two years after menarche. For those who are married after puberty the consummation ceremony is generally held about a year after the wedding itself. People say that it looks bad if it occurs earlier (see chapter 3). It is a simple ceremony in which a party from the groom's village arrives to fetch the bride. She is presented with clothes by members of her natal family and other villagers. Then she performs another doorway puja (dahli puja) by annointing the doorway with vermillion powder. The women of the village smear turmeric paste on the clothes and beards of members of the groom's party and the bride leaves the village weeping copiously in much the same manner as she left the village at

the end of the wedding rituals themselves. On arrival in the groom's village there are no special rituals, although if a married sister of the groom is free she will come and organise an evening of singing and dancing for the women of her brother's village to celebrate the event. That night the bride and groom are allowed to sleep together for the first time.

Comment: Before her ano the bride has divided her time between residence in her natal village and residence in her husband's village, always going to her husband's village for festivals such as Naumi and Savpitr Amavas when deities and ancestors of her husband's gotra are worshipped. After her ano she spends the majority of her time in her husband's family returning to her natal home only for special occasions and for festivals such as Rakhi and Holi if she can be spared. Thus the ano ritual marks not only the physical consummation of the marriage but in conjunction with this, the final separation of the woman from her natal family. As I will show in the chapter on birth, the final incorporation of the woman into her husband's family seems to occur with the birth of her first child.

SUMMARY OF RITUALS

The overall structure of the marriage complex can be summarised as follows:

(1) Rites of Separation: The processes of separation are gradual and take place in several phases. They are of two kinds. One kind concerns the separation of bride and groom from their kin and residential groups so that the individual union of bride and groom may be accomplished and the bride may be transferred from one group to another. Under this heading rituals such as nikasi, kanyadan, dalhi puja and ano can be included. Rituals such as sagai which mark the bride-to-be off from her kin group are in part rites of separation and in part the beginning of the process of incorporation.

The second kind of rite of separation includes those rites that separate objects and people from their normal profane state so that they may play a part in the wedding. Such rites include lagan patri, haldi mahurt, Ganesa puja, acchat pacchat etc. Certain rites of consecration such as the gotra puja performed at the construction of the mandap are specifically concerned with making objects and people sacred through the invocation of gotra and other deities.

(2) Rites of Transition: These are the rites which seem to bring about substantive changes in bride and groom. Some such as the haldi bath and the preparation of bride and groom seem largely concerned with social puberty. Others such as lagan and phera seem mainly to express the personal union that occurs between bride and groom. The transfer of bride from one group to another which involves her change of gotra and therefore in one sense a substantive change seems to be expressed by the various rites of separation and incorporation, rather than rites of transition as such.

(3) Rites of Incorporation: Like the rites of separation there seem to be two kinds of rites of incorporation. One set concerns processes that incorporate the bride into her husband's kin group, for example the rites greeting her on arrival in her husband's village. The other set concerns the incorporation of objects and people involved in the wedding back into the profane or at least less highly charged sacred world that they ordinarily belong to. The latter type of rite includes rituals such as thanda karna and mandap barsana.

For a woman the net result of these rites is that she emerges with a new gotra, her social persona absorbed into her husband's. Marriage gives her access to a sacred domain which gives her an honoured role in the creation of the 'moral community'; and so long as the husband is alive

makes it auspicious. Access to this domain removes the woman forever from the powers associated with the status of kumari. In the final section of this chapter I examine in more detail the way in which a woman's social maturation is represented symbolically and what this conveys about the transition and the auspicious powers of married women. I shall also discuss the way the marriage rituals represent women's dual filiation and contrast it with the symbolism of menstruation in the previous chapter. This contrast highlights the qualities of social sexuality as opposed to the qualities of physical sexuality.

MARRIAGE AS METABIRTH

In chapter 1 I argued that the symbolism surrounding marriage rituals and other life-cycle rites represents men and women's membership of kinship groupings as having more than a physical aspect. This seems to be achieved by images of physical events transformed so they become devoid of the physical pollution usually associated with these events. The social puberty of the bride and groom which occurs at marriage gives them adult status in their gotra - and the construction of this status as it is expressed in the marriage rituals conveys something of the nature of the social aspect of a man's membership of kin-groupings, and the forces required to create it.

The image of a second or meta-birth is recurrent at certain points in the marriage rituals, and is an essential part of the representation of the social puberty of the bride and groom's status and how this change is brought about. To review, the rituals most concerned with this meta-birth seem to be as follows. On the evening of bana baithana, Ganesa is worshipped and put into the lap of the mother of the groom/bride. Later that evening the groom/bride is worshipped with his/her mother touching his/her

shoulder. As I shall discuss in more detail in chapter 6, the lap is often used as a symbol of the filial relation between mother and child and of a woman's fecundity. The mother is represented as having a god in her lap and then her child is treated as if he/she is a deity. The implication seems to be that the consecration of the groom/bride involves his/her rebirth as a deity. Many songs sung at this time explicitly compare the spouse to Ganesa. One such runs: 'Oh Ganesa lord, come into the groom's clothes'. It should be noted here that not only is this 'birth' free of pollution but unlike the physical event, the filial relation at this birth is socially manipulable. As described above only a married woman with a living husband may take the role of mother and this social status is more important than the fact that the woman is the groom/bride's gentrix. Unlike the relations of real birth, here social relations are manipulated to place this 'birth' in an ordered cosmic framework where only married women with living husbands have the powers needed.

Another image of rebirth involving the groom/bride and his/her mother concerns the drawing of vermillion janeu. Here the symbolism of the janeu itself as well as the relation of mother and child seems to express the idea of rebirth. The upanayan ritual in which the true sacred thread is invested is seen as a second birth (cf. Basham 1971: 162ff), hence the justification of seeing the janeu as an image of rebirth.

Only two castes in Ambakhedi (the Brahmans and the Thakurs) actually perform the upanayan proper. It seems significant that even they generally celebrate the ceremony just before marriage; since for them too, marriage combined with upanayan is the event which marks individuals as social adults rather than the upanayan on its own. In theory upanayan should mark the stage when a boy becomes a brahmacārī (a celibate student). In practice this stage has

little meaning - even for the Brahmans and Thakurs who wear the sacred thread, since because the upanayan and marriage are performed so close together there is no period of unmarried celibacy. However as noted above consummation and marriage are separate.

The mock upanayan of the marriage ritual is different from the classical upanayan in other notable respects. Firstly unlike the classical upanayan it is performed for both men and women suggesting that through marriage both men and women undergo a form of rebirth. In the formal upanayan only men are invested with the sacred thread. Secondly in the formal upanayan it is the Brahman who invests the individual with the janeu - in the marriage ceremony it is the mother. This suggests that the mother in the wedding rituals has a function which although different from the Brahman's parallels it in some way. I would suggest that the Brahman's power in the upanayan ritual proper stems from his purity and association with sacred texts which give him status in the 'moral community'. The mother's power in the wedding stems from her role as a married woman with a place to play in the creation of social persona in the 'moral community', and another kind of status linked to different powers.

Other images of birth occur in the marriage ceremony particularly in the rituals surrounding the preparation of bride and groom. The bride/groom are almost naked like small children at one point. He/she is often carried as if a child. He/she is annointed with lampblack the way children are. The most dramatic image is when the barat is about to depart and the mother of the groom actually tries to breast feed her child.[31]

Bloch and Guggenheim suggest that the acting out of a mock birth may be an essential part in the creation of an ideological community. The evidence above and in other chapters suggests that Malwa marriage rituals do in fact constitute such a mock birth. Bloch and Guggenheim also argue

that 'substitute spiritual parents' must accompany a mock birth. These must not be the biological parents, or at the very least not the biological mother. It would seem that in Malwa weddings, the mother may be the genitrix. However she need not be the genitrix and so the symbolism of the difference between the roles of genitrix and that of mother is still expressed in the rituals. The sharp distinction between spiritual and physical parents is not found because the ties which bind together the 'moral community' are centred round membership of caste and kinship groupings where the image of physical descent rather than for example church membership, is important. This point will become clearer when the way that physical birth is treated ritually is discussed in the next chapter but the marriage rituals in themselves do suggest an adult membership of his or her 'moral community' is based on something other than the physical ties and that married women who are not polluting have an important role in the construction of this status. This role is an expression of what I have called social sexuality and it is significant that menstruating, widowed, and unmarried women are excluded from it.

TURMERIC AND SOCIAL SEXUALITY

As part of the process of social maturation that occurs at marriage, the bride and groom acquire powers which entitle them to take part in wedding rituals of others. Following the argument that marriage is about creating adult persons, this implies they acquire powers which give them a role in the creation of these persons. If it is accepted that birth is one of the most important images in the creation of this persona it is perhaps not surprising that the image of other aspects of human sexuality is also involved. However just as the 'birth' in a wedding is stripped of its polluting connotations so other aspects of sexuality in weddings are stripped of their polluting connotations. They thus become symbols for the

power of men and women to create new members of the 'moral community'.

Turmeric is the substance which has symbolic properties which most clearly express the nature of this social sexuality. Its links with fertility and sexuality are several. It is seen by informants as essential if a marriage is to be blessed with children (cf. Selwyn 1979: 685). It is linked to the sexual act in that it is used at ano (the consummation ceremony) and the prohibition of the mother of the groom/bride rubbing turmeric on him/her seems linked to more general notions about the inappropriateness of any display of sexuality by children in the presence of their parents or vica versa. Kumari may not rub turmeric on themselves - although this is always linked to their unmarried status rather than their immaturity.

At the same time other beliefs about turmeric serve to separate from physical sexuality with which it is associated. Although it is believed necessary for a marriage to be blessed with children, no part in the process of reproduction is ascribed to it and villagers know that unmarried girls can and do get pregnant. Unlike the sexual act it is considered essential to the wedding and it was generally felt that civil marriages which take place in the city are not true marriages because no turmeric is involved.

The sexual act itself is mildly polluting, menstruation and other sexual secretions are polluting, turmeric is not. The opposite is the case. It is associated with rites of consecration. During the turmeric bath women sing songs likening the spouse to deities. One such runs:

> My groom is like Ram,
> He is taking a bath in turmeric,
> My groom has come from the house of Ram,
> They are bathing him in oil.

Turmeric is also associated with the part of the marriage where the purity and auspiciousness of the bride and groom are most heightened.- The ends of the groom's loin-cloth and the sari of the bride which are tied together at the lagan are dyed in turmeric. Some castes even draw a line round the house in turmeric in order to consecrate the house for the wedding.

Moreover turmeric, unlike the powers associated with the physical sexuality of women at menstruation, protects women from the spirit world rather than exposing them to it. This protective power is seen in the dying of the protective thread tied to the bride and groom at gatha bamdhana. Thus rather than representing a force which is antithetical to the principles of the wider community, turmeric seems to represent a force which protects men and women from liminal dangerous forces and events and at the same time is associated with the bringing of new life into the community.

Turmeric is associated with rowdy behaviour in that the turmeric baths and other occasions when turmeric is smeared on bride and groom and guests often become occasions for boisterous chases and struggles. It is spoken of as 'hot' (cf. Selwyn 1979: 685). At the same time it is considered cooling and purifcatory. The rowdiness and dishevelment associated with turmeric are not seen as threatening in the way that mature physical sexuality may be (cf. chapters 3 and 4); its cooling purificatory aspect suggest it has a place within the processes of the 'moral community' rather than presenting a threat. This taken together with the other evidence is the justification for seeing as representing the powers of social sexuality men and women acquire at marriage. Its essential role in marriage also indicates the importance of these powers in creating adult social persona. At marriage women (and men) acquire powers which are associated with mature sexuality

yet are distinct from this sexuality and which give them a role and status inside the 'moral community'.

SOCIAL MATURATION IN WOMEN

The rites of social puberty described above do not differ in as much as the maturity they bring about gives men and women different positions in the 'moral community'. In the wedding rituals this difference is expressed in the different roles men and women, other than the bride and groom, play in the different rituals. The significance of this will be discussed in more detail in chapter 8 and referred to in parts of chapter 7. It concerns the differences in the powers that male and female social sexuality involves and the relation of these powers to physical sexuality.

As far as the bride and groom are concerned within the marriage complex their different positions in the 'moral community' seem reflected in the way in which in addition to rites indicating that the bride is acquiring the certain powers to do with mature social sexality which parallel ritesthe groom performs, there are many other rites to do with the transfer of the bride from one kin group to another. Her social maturity is linked, from the very beginning of the marriage complex, to her links with her future husband's agnatic kin. In the engagement ritual her future father-in-law puts gifts in her lap. He makes similar god bharai presentations soon after the barat arrives in the bride's village and after the central wedding rites. He makes the final god bharai presentation at her first pregnancy. In chapter 3 it was demonstrated that physical maturity is inappropriate if a girl is unmarried and must be dissociated from her natal kin. The linking of a bride with her husband's gotra before any major changes take place suggest that her social maturity depends upon this link. It was also pointed out in chapter 3 that she is excluded from the worship of the gotra goddess at Naumi - in the wedding she worships one

personification of this goddess Mai Mata only after the groom has arrived, and she may conduct this worship with him. It almost seems as if her adult links with her own natal kin depend on her relationship with her husband and her husband's gotra. In this way her social persona becomes incorporated into his.

THE POSITIVE ASPECTS OF DUAL FILIATION

In chapter 4 it was argued that the pollution and symbolism connected with menstruation expressed the way that female physical sexuality acted as the sensory pole in symbols expressing the disruptive aspects of women's dual filiation to kingroups. The formal ideology of marriage indicates that a woman changes her gotra at marriage leaving her father's to become a member of her husband's. However given that women are not only thought of 'as eating in two places' but also at death, rites are performed in a woman's natal household as well as her conjugal household (see chapter 7) it seems reasonable to suppose that the marriage rituals themselves may reflect a woman's dual filiation in some way. If previous contentions about marriage and kinship ideology are correct, one would expect such representations to be less obvious than the total transfer of a woman between kingroups since this is the key stone of the dominant patrilineal ideology. In addition it would be expected that since marriage is about giving individuals adult membership in the 'moral community' the aspects of dual filiation will be represented as contributing to this 'moral community' rather than those aspects symbolised at menstruation where a woman's dual filiation is seen as disruptive.

Perhaps the most obvious way in which the bride's continued association with her natal home is depicted in marriage is the way in which some rituals represent the incorporation of the groom into the bride's household in some

way. While members of the groom's household and members of the bride's household may be defined clearly as wife-takers or wife-givers respectively, the groom by virtue of his personal union with the bride seems to occupy a special position reflecting perhaps his wife's liminal position between two groups. The evidence for this within the marriage complex can be divided into that involving rituals concerning the groom and that involving the role of the husband's of daughters or sisters of the natal family ie. the khvansa.

After the barat has arrived and has been greeted, and before the rites of phera and the lagan, rites occur which suggest that the groom undergoes a quasi incorporation into the household of the bride if not into her gotra. Gupta describing similar ties in Rajasthan writes that they concern 'the acceptance and recognition of the groom as a new member of the bride's family' (Gupta 1974: 97). The groom is greeted by the mother of the bride who touches his head in the same way that his own mother will touch his head when he returns to his own village and he and his bride are incorporated into the life of the household. After this the groom then actually enters inside his bride's house and once inside the house he worships Mai Mata the clan goddess of his bride.[32] His agnates and in particular his father, although identified as wife takers in such rituals as god bharai, are not involved at this stage. Here it is the groom's individual union with the bride that predominates and this is what brings him inside his wife's house, suggesting the way that temporarily at least he is incorporated into his wife's gotra in some way through his personal union with the bride. It is perhaps significant that the groom is brought into the household by the mother of the bride rather than her father, for in the patrilineal system she is less central than the bride's father, emphasising that the groom's link with the household is through women both at the level of spouse and parent in law and therefore is of a different quality than

the links forged between bride and her new household through men in such rituals as god bharai and kanyadan.[33]

Later as his wife's husband he may be allowed to take part in the gotra puja of weddings of members of his wife's natal family. In many castes the worship of the gotra deities and in particular Mai Mata may only be witnessed by members of the gotra, married sisters and daughters of this gotra and their husbands. Sons of the women are not allowed to see these ceremonies so it is not a question of complementary filiation. Neither are the senior agnates of the husband allowed to watch it, again suggesting that it is a privilege of the groom alone rather than the wife-taking group as a whole.

Other roles that the groom will play in marriages in his wife's natal home concern rituals where khvansa are involved. These include khal mitti, the construction of the marriage booth, and rites to do with the preparation of bride and groom. These are rites connected with consecration and transition. Selwyn(1979: 689ff) considers that in this way wife-takers (ie. the ZH) give honour to wife-givers. The family holding the wedding and the role of khvansa is part of a process in which a chain of honour is constructed between wife-givers and wife-takers. This may well be one of the functions of the role of married men in weddings in their wife's natal household but in the Malwa region where the hierarchy between wife-givers and wife-takers is not so pronounced it may not be so important as it is in the region studied by Selwyn. In general people say that khvansa, should be a jamāī (a son-in-law) or a jījā (sister's husband). They are never senior members of the khvansi's conjugal group, indicating that it is the individual bond that is formed at marriage that is important here and not the bond formed between groups. A mother's brother can not perform the role of khvansa because he is not married to a natal member of the household. In instances where a suitable khvansa is lacking

in preference a mother's sister's husband will be chosen for he is married to a sister of a woman of the household if not to a sister or daughter of the man.

These kinds of data suggest ways in which a man forms special links with his wife's family through his individual union with her. In turn this can be taken to indicate the way in which he becomes involved with her natal family through the links that she retains with it, ie. through what I have called above her dual filiation.

The groom's involvement with his bride's gotra is depicted as auspicious and pure and not a source of tension. Certain other rituals suggest that a bride's liminal position with regard to her natal household is auspicious. Appropriately enough these rituals involve the symbol of the doorway itself. There are two occasions in the wedding ritual when a woman actually worships the doorframe of her natal house; the first is when she leaves the house with the barat to go to her husband's home for the first time and the second is when she leaves her natal home at her ano ritual. In one sense these can be interpreted as rites of separation. The woman is simply passing through the doorway and leaving her natal home. What is significant however is that the woman is not simply carried through the door but stops to worship the doorstep. Van Gennep writes 'the door is the boundary between foreign and domestic worlds in the case of an ordinary dwelling, between the profane and sacred worlds in the case of a temple. Therefore to cross the threshold is to unite oneself with a new world. It is thus important in marriage, adoption, ordination and funeral ceremonies. It will be noted thatrites carried out on the threshold are transition rites' (Van Gennep 1960: 20). The puja that the bride performs indicates her changed relation, not only in the sense of her membership of her natal family but to the boundaries of her kinship grouping, and the doorway puja seems to be about her transition to a particular

kind of liminal status. It suggests that she now has some special relation to the state of transition that the doorway represents and this relation is auspicious.

It seems revealing that, as a married sister, it is she who demands money from her brother before his new bride can cross the threshold. As someone who has passed through a kinship boundary she seems to have a special position in regulating the comings and goings that involve crossing that boundary. When her brother has a baby ideally it is his sister who should mark the door frame with a vermillion swastik and if possible place a prickly plant there to prevent malevolent influences from entering the house. When the bride is fetched at the ano ceremony it is the man's sister who should organise a songfest in her honour. Her liminality unlike the liminality associated with menstruation is unequivocally associated with life and the well being of the household. She acquires this power by virtue of her marriage - suggesting it is an aspect of the social sexuality she acquires at marriage.

As a married women in her conjugal home there are also certain occasions when a woman's association with her natal home seems to be associated not with a capacity to cause death or disruption but rather to dissociate herself from death. After a death in the conjugal household, all members of the household are considered severely ~~severally~~ polluting for ten or eleven days and must stay inside the house as much as possible. At the end of this period, after the purificatory rituals have been performed, it is considered necessary for all the women of the household to go and stay with their natal kin for a short period. This practice is known as leaving the threshold, dahlī churāī. Until they have done this, women are thought of as inauspicious and likely to bring death or misfortune to any households in their husband's village which they visit. It is as if women use their dual allegiance to separate kingroups to

dissociate themselves from the inauspicious forces associated with death. They 'leave the threshold' ie. pass through the boundary of the house where death has occurred - and temporarily align themselves with their natal family which is not associated with death. When they re-enter their husband's home they are no longer inauspicious. A widow also becomes less impure after such a visit home and where she will be given new clothes by her brother.

Thus while although as suggested in the chapter on menstruation a woman's dual allegiance may on occasion be threatening, the puja that a woman makes on her natal threshold at marriage suggests the way that as a sister she will have an important function in rituals where women are brought in as brides and cross the family threshold and that as a wife sometimes her ability to pass the boundary of her husband's family will be a way of removing inauspicious forces and therefore beneficial to her husband. The bride's worship of the threshold in the wedding therefore seems to mark an important aspect of her married status with regard to both her natal and her conjugal kin groups. A woman's dual filiation when contextualised in the context of the marriage rituals and <u>not</u> associated with physical sexuality is thus associated with integration into the life of the 'moral community'.

When associated with a limited allegiance of her husband to her natal <u>gotra</u>, a woman seems to possess auspicious powers linked to the creation of new life within the 'moral community' and this contrasts with the way in which this dual allegiance when associated with independent action is linked to threatening aspects of threatening female physical sexuality. The issue is a complex one but if as Ruby Watson has suggested 'Affinity is a marginal item operated by marginal people' (pers comm), it seems important. It also seems significant in understanding how perceptions of different aspects of female powers are

socially constructed and given different kinds of status.

CONCLUSION: MARRIAGE AND THE RITUAL STATE OF WOMEN

As far as social definitions of women's phyiscal states are concerned, marriage rituals indicate that images of certain physical processes such as birth and puberty can be stripped of their polluting connotations and so become conceptually separate from the processes themselves, conveying qualitatively different powers. This contextual separation of aspects of female power which are considered dirty and polluting from other aspects which are considered honourable and auspicious, yet with both having to do with sexuality, is a theme that will recurr in the discussion of birth and motherhood. It is a way of understanding how women can be polluting when menstruating but at other times are the chief ritualists in their own households, indicating their purity and their possession of auspicious and beneficial powers. This view involves accepting the premise put forward chapter 1 that the sacred is not a homogeneous whole and that women in particular are constantly being re-pivoted in regard to it. Their pivoting is crucial in the integration of physical events into a wider cosmic order.

Important as this aspect of female status is, the structure of the marriage rituals indicates that women only acquire these powers in the context of change of kinship group. Female powers honoured in the 'moral community' are only activated by the transfer of women between groups, a transfer largely conducted by men. This transfer changes in physical state is socially manipulable. As suggested in the chapter on kumari where the lack of elaborate puberty or nubility rituals was discussed (in the sense that they do not occur independently of marriage rituals) it is this social change which encompasses and orients the physical powers with respect to the sacred.

Finally just as I have argued that women possess a social sexuality that is distinct from their physical sexuality and has higher status, so it seems that their dual allegiance when expressed as a means of bringing new life into the gotra and the creation of the 'moral community' through its specific association with marriage, also has positive aspects. These positive aspects become attributes of a woman's social sexuality just as the negative aspects become associated with her physical sexuality. This is another way in which a woman comes to value the powers she acquires through her association with men and denigrate her physical sexuality and action taken independently of the male ordered 'moral community'.

Notes

1. I have called this chapter 'The Marriage Complex' because it includes events that some might see as peripheral to the central wedding rites: namely details of the consummation and engagement ceremonies.

2. CF. Gupta who writes in his analysis of Rajasthani marriage rituals 'Each of these rites is given several meanings, not because they are mistaken or confused but because every ritual symbolically represents a multiplicity of meanings, functions and goals. An explanation of binori of instance may include a public announcement of marriage, a rejoicing of kinsmen and friends, a preparation for new status, a demonstration of support by allies, servants and friends and an unusual euphoria'. (Gupta 1974: 157).

3. For example the relation between wife-givers and wife-takers implies that it is dishonourable for the wife-givers to take anything from the wife-takers. A married woman therefore receives gifts from her natal family but her conjugal family gives them nothing in return. In households with a number of daughters-in-law the treatment each receives sometimes varies according to the number of gifts a woman receives from her natal family. If the families differ sharply in wealth the women from the poorer or less generous families generally receive less good treatment.

4. It should be noted that the three kinds of status change referred to here are analytical categories which involve but are distinct from the three aims of marriage in classical Hinduism: dharma (see chapter 2), praja (progeny) and rati (pleasure), cf. Kapadia 1966: 167.

5. Where a Hindi expression is commonly used by informants to describe a ritual, I have headed the description with the Hindi name commonly used and an English gloss where appropriate. Where there is no common expression I have headed the paragraph with an English title which conveys the nature of the ritual.

6. Discussions about matches take place over a number of years and among Rajputs members of a boy's family visit villages and circumspectly inspect possible brides. Once one is found the family is usually approached through a relative or friend living in the village concerned who acts as a matchmaker. The engagement rituals described here take place once this initial period of matchmaking is over (cf. Mayer 1973: 206-7).

7. The jewellry possessed and worn by a woman indicates her marital status. For example those girls whose engagements have taken place wear anklets and after marriage they also wear bichiya (toe rings). For a full discussion of the significance of various items of jewellry among rural women in Madhya Pradesh see Jacobson 1976.

8. This seems to be part of a pattern of exchange that occurs among those castes where wife-giving and wife-taking groups are seen as more or less equal and gotras can act as both wife-givers and wife-takers to one another. This accords with a situation where overall wedding expenditure is more or less equal for bride and groom's side and seems in line with other observations on marriage practices in Malwa (cf. Mayer op. cit., and Tambiah 1973: 100). Most castes in the village conform to these patterns.

   However there are two major variations in this pattern. Among the Darzi, Teli, Nai, Khumbi and Lodhi it is customary to make fairly substantial presents to the groom which begin at the engagement and conclude at the central wedding rites. These include watches, radios, cycles etc. but rarely cash. The formal presentation is also made by her prospective father-in-law at the engagement. Among the Thakurs and Rajput Yadav where wife-giving gotras never receive bride's from gotras defined as wife-takers in respect to them, substantial amounts of money are given to the groom and formal presentations made at the engagement. There is no formal presentation of gifts to brides at the engagement ritual.

   Tambiah has suggested that in India dowry (ie. the settling of gifts on a girl) is the dominant and most prestigious form of marriage prestation. Therefore many practices where the groom's side makes gifts or payments to the bride's family that are analogous in any way to brideprice these payments will normally be subsumed in the form of dowry, ie. used to help pay for the dowry settled on the bride.

In addition Tambiah suggests that dowry is associated with hypergamy and a situation where wife-givers are inferior to wife-takers and are excluded from contact with one another. The three patterns of marriage exchange found in Ambakhedi bear this out. In the Purviya Rajput caste and the group of castes including the Darzi there is no great emphasis on one side giving gifts rather than another and distinctions between wife-giving and wife-taking gotras are weak. In the third case the exchanges are more like those described by Lewis (cf. Tambiah 1973: 98) for North India where the notion of the superior of wife-taking gotras is strong. Rajput Yadavs and Thakurs of the third group in Ambakhedi are fairly recent immigrants into the region and have wide marriage networks.

The case of the group of castes which includes the Darzi and where gifts are made to both bride and groom at engagement seems to be a kind of middle case half way between the Thakur group and the Purviya Rajputs. This group makes many marriages into city families and it seems possible that patterns of giving extensively to both bride and groom are a product of the basic Malwa pattern combined with developments occurring in the cities. As Tambiah comments 'It is the case that under conditions of modernisation and urbanisation parents invest large sums in their son's education so that they can secure professional and administrative jobs. Parents may therefore feel that these investments on their sons should be recouped at marriage. Such developments can be expected to manifest themselves fully among the urban middle classes rather than their poorer bretheren' (Tambiah 1973: 63).

Obviously these points deserve fuller discussion than the footnote affords but they do set the variations that occur in marriage exchanges which begin at the sagai in a wider context.

9. As far as the appropriation of fertility is concerned the following description of the engagement ceremony based on textual sources for medieval India seems relevant. At the ritual the father of the bride orally gives the girl to the groom's father. He then says 'This girl has been orally given by me for progeny and accepted by you...' (Pandey 1949: 212). He then adds some other information which seems to connect this ceremony with the one under discussion. 'After the proposal was accepted the father of the bridegroom worshipped the girl with rice, clothes, flowers etc. according to family custom' (ibid.).

10. Das (1976: 248 suggests that in addition to divisions of purity and impurity 'lateral and spatial categories provide important symbols for dividing the sacred, cosmic world into two parts: the sacred associated with life and the sacred associated with death'. The proscription on members of a household attending the funeral feast would suggest that it is this kind of opposition that is operating here given the connection between weddings and fertility. See also Das (ibid. 252 and discussion in chapter 7).

11. It is perhaps significant that turmeric is not made into a paste and applied externally in everyday life as it is in weddings, rather it is used as a flavouring. Thus in addition to being specially consecrated it is marked as different in ritual by it's external application which contrasts with its internal consumption in normal life.

12. The Stutleys describe the position of Ganesa in Hinduism as follows 'He is the typical embodiment of success in life and its accompaniments of good living, prosperity and peace...In all ceremonies (except funeral rites) and undertakings Ganesa is first invoked' (Stutley, J. and M. 1977: 92).

13. This ritual involves moving a lamp in front of spouse's face in a slow circular motion and often accompanies the worship of the gods (cf. Gupta 1974: 89).

14. Songs about married life often concern the theme of the difficulties that a woman will face in her new household, the implication being that women's attitude to their new status is somewhat ambivalent. One song begins.

'Who hit me with the first rasagula?
(a Hindu sweet)
It was my sasur, (father-in-law)
But I did not mind because he is so old.
Who hit me with the second rasagula?
It was my jeth, (husband's elder brother)
But I did not mind because he is older than me.

It goes through all the members of the woman's conjugal household concluding with the lines:

'Who hit me with the fifth rasagula?
It was my husband but I did not mind,
Because he is mine'.

Another song which uses the image of brinjals somewhat suggestively also portrays married life as something of mixed quality involving pain and benefits. It begins:

'The brinjals are very tasty,
When I plucked them the thorns pricked me,
The brinjals are very tasty,
When I cut the brinjals,
I cut my four fingers...'

Thus the women's songs provide a commentary which links the world of the marriage complex where bride and groom are presented as deities to the more real problems of daily life in the household.

15. This seems linked in a more general way to the feeling that adult children should never show any sign of sexual maturity in the presence of their parents or spouse's parents. This feeling is expressed in a variety of ways. Within the conjugal household husband and wife should never show any sign of their relationship by talking to one another or sitting near one another when the husband's parents are present. Most men feel embarrassment (sarm) in playing with their own children in the presence of their parents. In her natal home a woman will often remove her toe rings as signs of her married status because she feels embarrassed, The few women who remained within their natal household at marriage felt embarrassed on becoming pregnant, not because of the pregnancy itself - most women return to their natal home for their first pregnancy at least but rather they said because it made their sexual relation with their husband obvious and this was embarrassing in their natal home.

16. Mayer's material indicates that a plough was used as one of the poles in the Malwa village in which he studied (Mayer pers. comm.) but this did not occur in any of the weddings which I observed.

17. It seems unclear precisely what the manak khamb is. Mayer (1973: 65) refers to it as a model of a parrot and describes how similar carved parrots are made to be placed on the toran or roof of the marriage booth. However no informant that I talked to attributed this characteristic to the manak khamb - in fact only one

informant offered any kind of detailed explanation at all. He told the following story.

There were two brothers and the elder's wife fell in love with the younger. The elder brother became jealous and killed the younger. These brothers had a sister and eventually she came to invite her brothers to her daughters wedding. On finding one of the brothers dead she went to the cremation ground to seek his spirit. The spirit appeared and said that he would send mamera (the traditional gifts of the mother's brother) to the wedding. The sister wept complaining that she wanted her brother's physical presence and not just his gifts. Her brother comforted her saying 'Think of me as being present in the manak khamb'. It is difficult to assess the implications of this but given that the first rituals performed under the mandap are to do with gotra deities, it may be that the manak khamb does in some way represent the links the deities have with affinally related groups. However this point needs further investigation.

18. Das notes an interesting comment made by another scholar on this point. 'Brenda Beck (personal communication) argues that in the Indian case she prefers to use relative sliding terms such as 'more sacred' and 'less sacred' but not the absolute distinction involved in dividing the sacred into good and bad' (Das 1976: 251).

19. The ritual can in part be interpreted as purification since cow dung is commonly used as a purifying agent and when rituals are conducted in the house the spot on which they are performed is usually purified by rubbing it with cow dung first.

20. This is how this feast is referred to on the printed invitations that the villagers order from Indore for the weddings - in speech however they more commonly refer to it as khãnã (food).

21. In many parts of India the groom bathes at this stage, the bath water being kept for the bride (Mayer pers. comm.) however as far as I could ascertain, this practice did not take place among any castes in the village.

22. In the dharmasastras this stage is referred to as grhastha, and is the second of the four asramas it follows that of brahmacaryi (the chaste student), see Kapadia 1966: 27.

23. Unlike other parts of India there seems to be no rite involving the rubbing of vermillion in the parting of the bride's hair at this point, or in the wedding complex (see for example Selwyn 1979: 688).

24. In the texts the rite of pani grahan, the worship of the sacred fire is the most central of the wedding rites and the most important in making the contract legally binding.

25. I have not included details of the mantras recited as the villagers themselves were very vague about this point and the different Brahmans involved seemed to use different texts. Kane also comments on the divergence of mantras recited in the central parts of weddings in contemporary India (Kane 1974: 534).

26. This terminology seems comparable to the following way in which kanyadan is conducted in the village where Gupta worked in Rajasthan. 'The bridal couple, the bride's parents and the priests take positions under the booth around the sacred fire for the rite of kanyadan. The priest seeks the consent of the bride's parents if they are willing to offer the dan (ritual gift) of their daughter to the bridegroom. He then begins chanting sacred mantras.....During the kanyadan ceremony, hathleva (gifts) are presented to the bride by the adult members of the family, caste and friends' (1974: 91).

27. Although the term dowry is applicable to these gifts in the analytical sense (see Tambiah 1973) informants would not agree to their being called dahej, the Hindu term for dowry. They argued that unlike the practices of certain castes in India where dowries were subject to negotiation (see for example ICSSR 1975: 25) each family gave freely what they could afford. In fact individual case studies of marriages indicated that the items that were given with the bride in marriage were the subject of some discussion between the two sides and a family may hesitate to fix a definite

date for the marriage if they thought that the bride's side were unlikely to provide gifts commensurate with the prestige of both sides. However open demands were rarely made and gifts of kanyadan were not seen as central in marriage negotiations as they are in certain communities in India (see ICSSR op. cit.).

28. Selwyn (1979: 688) discussing a similar meal in the marriage complex of North Madhya Pradesh places the emphasis of his interpretation on the fact that the wife eats after the husband and is therefore eating his leftover food. This indicates the 'ranked relationship' of husband and wife with the husband's superiority to the wife being the significant feature of the ritual. Admittedly this may be the ritual message at one level: however the idea of individual union seems equally important.

Van Gennep suggests that meals are often used to signify union (Van Gennep 1960: 29). In addition this interpretation is in line with certain textual sources pertaining to marriage in India. Pandey writes '... the husband made the wife eat the mess of cooked food with the words, 'I add breath to thy breath, bones to thy bones, flesh to thy flesh, skin to thy skin'... Eating with the wife is prohibited in the Hindu Dharmasatra but it is an exceptional case entailing no sin. The ceremony symbolises the union of persons of both the husband and the wife'.(Pandey 1949: 225). It can be added that in general in Ambakhedi as well, husband and wife rarely eat in the presence of one another, so this is an exceptional event adding weight to the idea that at one level this ritual emphasises personal union.

29. Mayer (1973: 188) writes that 'Bheru is a ferocious aspect of the god Siva, born from Parvati his wife'. Each unilineal descent group worships at its own particular Bheru shrine which is why occasionally the Bheru shrine where a man should worship after his marriage is situated outside the village.

30. The postponement of consummation of marriage until some later time after the central marriage rites seems echoed by the Dharmasastra writers. Basham writes 'For three nights the couple were expected to remain continent; in some texts they are allowed to sleep together with a staff between them, but others instruct them to sleep

apart on the ground. On the fourth night the husband performed a rite to promote conception and the marriage was consummated' (1971: 169).

31. Interestingly Hershman has noted similar images of birth in Punjabi marriage ritual (Hershman 1977: 287ff.) Unfortunately I only realised the number of birth images present in the marriage ritual after I left the field and was unable to ask informants how far they were conscious of these images.

32. It may also be significant that it is the gotra's female deity that the groom worships, ie. Mai Mata - possibly suggesting that his link with the unilineal descent group is through female ties. The worship of Mai Mata by bride and groom in the groom's house is paralleled by the worship of Mai Mata in the bride's house. Bheru the gotra's male deity is only worshipped in the groom's house and not in the bride's.

33. The appropriateness in this case is linguistic for limen means threshold in latin.

CHAPTER 6

THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF BIRTH

Childbirth is a physiological process but the ways in which it is managed in different cultures reflect more than the constraints physiology imposes. The management of childbirth and the rituals accompanying it indicate values a given society associates with the physical process of birth and female reproductive powers in general.[1] Since a major hypothesis of this thesis is that physical birth and reproductive powers are devalued and given low status when compared with social birth and social reproductive powers one would expect evidence of this in the rituals surrounding birth and it is just such evidence which is explored in this chapter.

Birth is part of a woman's role of mother, but the role of mother involves more than a woman's functions as genitrix. She is also mater a mother in a social sense with rights and duties towards her children that are socially constructed. Although this is true in all cultures, the relation of the role of genitrix to that of mater is perceived differently in different societies. Understanding how the event of birth is perceived is the first step towards an understanding of the relation between the physical and social aspects of maternity.

Writers such as Dube (1978a) and Meillassoux (1978) have looked at the 'ideology of reproduction' in India. They have examined theories about conception and the growth of the child in the mother's womb and have shown how there is a devaluation of the women's contribution when compared to men's. They have linked this to the way in which a woman's contribution to the productive system as a whole is

devalued at the expense of men's. Men and women in Ambakhedi were unable to give such clearly articulated theories of reproduction[2], so in order to discern the way in which a woman's reproductive powers were viewed I have examined the rituals surrounding birth to see what the symbolism conveys.

Just as marriage rites are multidimensional implying different sorts of transition so birth involves different sorts of transition. Firstly it involves the physical changes that take place within a woman in order to produce the physical form of a child. Secondly it involves the creation of a social status for the child. Thirdly it is, in a first pregnancy at least, the event that gives a woman the additional role of mother to add to those of daughter, wife, sister etc., that she already fulfills. The rituals surrounding birth imply something about each of these transitions, their relation to the 'moral community' and a woman's status within it.

Marriage rituals do not involve pollution since the transitions that occur at marriage do not contradict the principles that order the 'moral community'. Neither does the liminality surrounding marriage involve silence and seclusion in the way that the liminal states associated with birth do. I shall argue below that the rituals surrounding birth represent having a baby as something outside and alien to the principles of the 'moral community'. In contrast, the principles involved in becoming mater as opposed to genitrix, and of integrating the baby into the social world are not alien to the 'moral community' and are represented differently. This leads to the debasement of a women in her role of genitrix but to her honour in her role as mater. The role of mater is related to the 'moral community' where men have control and women are represented as dependent on men.

The symbolism surrounding birth is important in understanding how the biological and social aspects of maternity are contextually separated from one another so that

one aspect of female power can be honoured while another is devalued. The symbolism concerning water and birth is also important in understanding that notions of female power being tamed or controlled are perhaps not as appropriate in this cultural context as they might be in others.

As with the chapters on menstruation and marriage the ethnographic evidence is presented first and the analysis is given separately in the second section..

SECTION 1: THE ETHNOGRAPHY

PREGNANCY

The girl and members of both her natal and conjugal households await her first pregnancy eagerly. The girl herself knows that if she does not conceive within two to three years of marriage her husband may look for another wife (see chapter 2).

A woman is not subject to any strict taboos during pregnancy. However once she realises she is pregnant she will not go to a house where someone has died recently as this is thought to be inauspicious. Also she may try and avoid barren women or women who have had many children who have died, for the curse of such women is thought to cause a miscarriage. Some women believe that if they see a snake during pregnancy their child will be blind. This is probably linked to the beliefs also current which say that the child will look like the person first seen by the woman after conception. There are no special dietary taboos - although eating food classified as warm eg. unrefined sugar is thought to bring about miscarriage.[3]

A girl does not make a formal announcement about her pregnancy (cf. Gideen, H. 1964) but since she ceases to be affected by menstrual taboos it gradually becomes obvious to more observant members of the household.

For some time both the daughter-in-law and mother-in-law will keep their suppositions about pregnancy to themselves and it is only as changes in the girl's figure become more obvious that they may refer to it openly. Even then the young girl will feel sarm and be reluctant to discuss matters in detail except with a married woman nearer her own age. A girl's closest confidantes about these matters generally are her brother's wife, her husband's elder brother's wife, her husband's younger brother's wife and sometimes her husband's sister. Men of the family will rarely refer to their women folk being pregnant.

Most women carry on working until the last possible moment. This resulted in at least two women, I knew of, who had had to deliver the child themselves in fields because they had not been able to reach home in time.

Nowadays about a third to half of all village births take place in a local cottage hospital where all the staff are women. - Consequently if a woman has a difficult or troublesome pregnancy she may seek advice from the doctors there. However many women - even those who will eventually deliver in hospital prefer to summon one of the village midwives - these are either from the Balai or Camar castes, - if they have trouble during pregnancy. These women can do massage and give advice on diet. They will generally be paid in unrefined sugar or cash for their services. It should be noted here that although these midwives are untouchable women, high caste women do not object to them doing massage - even although pregnancy seems to be a relatively pure state and the pregnant woman is not herself untouchable. As stated above a woman will avoid the house of the dead, and the cremation ground - but it would seem likely that this is because these are associated with death rather than impurity per se.

Among some castes a woman's first delivery will ideally take place in her natal home and if this is the case before she returns to her natal home - after the seventh

month - she will take part in small ritual called god bharai (lapfilling) which I describe below. Deliveries other than the first may or may not take place in the woman's natal home. This will depend on a number of factors including how much a woman's labour is needed in her sasural, and on the relative wealth of her sasurāl and maikā. There were cases of women who did not return to their maikas for delivery because they had other children whom they could not leave. Some did not even return home for their first baby - and justified this by saying that their sasural was more wealthy than their maika[4] and was therefore a more comfortable place to give birth. However women seem on the whole to find it more relaxing if they can give birth in their maika and many of the songs - (see appendix 1) express the relaxation and comfort they feel after giving birth in their maika as compared with the tensions they feel after giving birth in their sasural.

The castes who do not allow a woman's delivery to take place in their maika are all castes from outside the Malwa region (the castes are Jatavs, Thakurs, Kolis, Khunbis, and Telis). Their attitude is similar to that of castes described by Jacobson in an area about 100 miles to the north of Ambakhedi (Jacobson 1970: 54). They feel since birth is the product of conjugal relations it has no place in the natal home. Most castes in Ambakhedi do not feel this way.

GOD BHARAI (Lap Filling)

This ritual is practised by nearly all the castes in the village and occurs some time during or after the seventh month of a girl's first pregnancy. It is always held in the girl's sasural . It is only performed during a girl's first pregnancy and seems to be a kind of rite de passage marking a girl's entry into motherhood.

Except in the case of the Nimar Khunbis the basic pattern for the ritual is the same for all castes. The Brahman is consulted to determine on which day it will be auspicious to hold the ritual and invitations are sent via the village barber to those the household wants to invite. Some members of a woman's natal family may be invited to attend as well as the woman's nanand (Hussi) and other friends and neighbours with whom the family has particularly close ties. If the family can afford it it is not uncommon for them to hold a kathā (sacred recitation) on the day before or after the celebration.

The beginning of the ritual itself is marked by the playing of the drummer and the assembly of invited guests at the house concerned. At the ceremonies I observed there were more women than men present and the men present (usually only the male members of the household concerned) remained in the background. The impression created is of it being very much a woman's event. The ritual takes place in the most public part of the house - usually the verandah.

Once most of the guests are assembled, the mother-to-be will remain in an inner part of the house while a married female member of the sasural (perhaps her jethānī (husbrowi), mother-in-law or nanand) will draw a ritual design known as a cauk on the floor of the room in which the ritual is to take place. Then a low wooden stool is placed on top of the design. Brass trays containing fruits, and various kinds of sweets are arranged in front of the stool. The mother-to-be is led by the Nai woman from the inner to the outer room and sits on the stool. The barber woman sits just behind her and remains there throughout the ceremony supervising operations. The mother-to-be is usually dressed in her finest clothes and wears as much jewellry as she possesses.

In some castes the senior male member (generally the jeth or sasur) of the sasural then breaks a coconut (or coconuts) in front of the mother-to-be and the pieces are taken

to the temple, and later distributed as prasad. After this he retires and the following women - the nanand, the jethani and sometimes the sās (some castes say she should never do this and in the ceremonies I observed she did not) then come forward to play their part. The first woman to do this should preferably be a woman whose own first born child is a boy. In any event only married women may perform this ceremony.

Each woman annoints the mother-to-be's forehead with rice and vermillion. The mother-to-be annoints the women with vermillion and rice and then the mother-to-be places the sweet things in front of her in the fold of the woman's sari and then touches the feet of the woman. The rice, sweets and fruit are then passed from the fold of the woman's sari to the sari fold of the mother-to-be and finally money is passed over the head of the mother-to-be to the Nai who is sitting behind. After this has been repeated by all of the women described above, the mother-to-be carefully clutching the fold of her sari in front of her goes to the three temples in the centre of the village and makes a small offering of money in each. All the while she retains the sweets and fruits in her sari. The way it is held in front of her makes it strongly reminiscent of the belly of a pregnant woman. She then returns to her house but before entering she takes the corner of her sari and touches the ground just in front of her father-in-law or husband's eldest brother who stands at the front of the house. He then gives her a small coin.

After this, the main part of the ritual is over and the women dance over the cauk to remove the design with their feet and money is passed over their heads to pay the drummer. The Nai woman departs with the coin she has taken and a small pile of grain left along with the sweets placed in front of the bride. Women may sit and sing for a while and the hostess may distribute jaggery, before all return to their homes. If a girl is going to her maika for her delivery then generally she will leave almost immediately

after this, which is one of the practical reasons for inviting members of the woman's natal family to attend the ceremony in the first place.

To review, a woman's pregnancy does not result in any marked liminal status. The prohibition on contact with houses of death and barren women suggest that she becomes more vulnerable to powers associated with death but that is all.

The god bharai of first pregnancy encapsulates certain features of the marriage ceremony, gifts being given to a girl by her father-in-law followed by her obeisance to him, and a payment of money to her suggesting that her pregnancy involves yet another stage of her incorporation into her conjugal household. Since a woman is more likely to stay married once she has a child and one of the purposes of marriage is to produce children,[5] this seems comprehensible.

BIRTH

As we have seen - unless it is her first baby or a woman is very wealthy, a woman will continue work much as normal until the last possible moment. When she feels the pains announcing the beginning of labour she will tell her mother-in-law or her mother. If the delivery is to take place at the hospital the older woman will then arrange for some man (generally not the husband) to take the girl there by bullock cart or on the back of a bicycle (sic). If the delivery is to take place at home a man will be sent to fetch the midwife from the area of the village where the low castes live.[6] - Since I am concerned with how birth is managed in traditional context of the village rather than in the context of a hospital with modern scientific techniques - I shall confine my attention largely to traditional ways of managing birth in the village.[7]

In contrast to the god bharai ceremony which takes place in the most public part of the house, birth takes place well away from the sight of outsiders and also well away from

the kitchen. For childbirth like menstruation makes a woman caukkebahar (outside the kitchen). Usually this means that birth takes place in an outhouse back storeroom - or cattle-shelter - a place not normally used for entertaining or daily living. Women explain this by saying that pollution equivalent to nine months menstrual pollution is associated with childbirth. High caste women also add that it is easy to deal with the entry of a low caste woman into the household if birth takes place in such an area.[8]

Because of the necessity to give birth in a private place away from the family kitchen once delivery actually starts - the woman who in her capacity as mother-to-be has been visible in her work in the fields or else sitting on the family verandah engaged in household tasks and gossiping with other women passing by, becomes invisible. This seems to make the taboos involving birth different from those involving menstruation - for although a menstruating woman should not go near a well or a kitchen she can stay in the public areas of the house and is visible to all (except when menarche occurs in the natal home). Only the mother or mother-in-law and the midwife are generally present in the same room as the girl during labour and most women claim to feel sarm at the physical exposure birth involves even in the presence of these experienced older women.

Birth is thought of as a private affair. It is also silent, however great the pain during labour a woman is encouraged to remain silent (cf. Luschinsky 1962; Jacobson 1970; Gideon 1964). It is considered a thing of sarm if other people, particularly men hear these cries. One midwife claimed that she beat mothers who made too much noise. One sas said she would arrange for her son to leave a radio playing so the noise if any occurred should not be heard. Another woman was praised for giving birth to numerous children in a house in the very centre of the village never making a sound.

It is not clear why the taboo on crying out during birth should be so strong - but it seems linked to a woman's physical relations with her husband. One common form of rebuke by midwives appeared to be 'you didn't cry out when your husband came to you - so why are you crying out now?' Another midwife said that during childbirth women would cry out abuse about their husbands. A male informant also added that if men 'without sarm' were sitting near the house of a woman in labour and heard her cry, instead of leaving as men 'with sarm' would do, they would stay and make innuendos about the woman and her husband. - This injunction to silence during birth is one reason some women prefer to give birth in hospital.[9] There the nurses may rebuke a woman who cries because she is outside the village she does not feel sarm. This aspect of birth taboos is discussed in detail in the second part of the chapter.

During labour the midwife may massage the stomach and buttocks and will press down on the abdomen. The woman is not given anything in particular to ease the pain but drinks of tea with jaggery in it may be given to sustain her. Also as jaggery is thought to be 'hot' this is said to speed delivery.[10]

After the birth the midwife should cut the cord - as it is considered highly polluting and women of many castes consider it particularly inauspicious for the mother herself to do it. However the mother may some times be forced to do this herself because of the attitudes of the midwives (see note 9). Traditionally the cord was cut by the midwife with a sickle which is then laid aside for the $1\frac{1}{4}$ month period after birth when the mother herself is considered particularly polluting.

Traditionally the midwife had the task of burying the placenta in a corner of the room where the child was born and after ten days female members of the family would light a fire over the spot in order to purify it. Nowadays

however according to the midwives many mothers simply feel that the placenta is something 'dirty' and ask the midwife to remove it from the house and bury it somewhere outside the village. - Mothers do not ask for it to be burnt for there is a common belief that if the placenta is burnt then harm will come to the child which seems to parallel beliefs that if the menstrual clothes used during menstruation are burnt then the woman concerned will become barren. - Some midwives disapprove of the practice of burying the placenta outside the village rather than in the home since they feel that animals or worse still, those anxious to do the child harm may disturb it, while if it is kept in the house then no harm will come to it.

No one was able to make an explicit statement about how the placenta might be used to harm a child - but one woman who had lost many children in infancy described how a man known for his ability to control spirits had been consulted and had insisted the placenta be buried within the home. - He had then done a small ritual over the spot where the placenta was buried and the child had survived beyond infancy. The belief that the fate of the placenta is somehow linked to the fate of the child seems to be fairly widespread in India. Gideon (1964: 1226) and Luschinsky also describe such beliefs (Luschinsky 1962: 72-73).

The midwife is responsible for washing the new born baby - cleaning the area where the birth has taken place. After the midwife has cleaned the place she may give the mother and baby a massage in oil and turmeric before leaving.[11] It is at this time that she will be paid in jaggery or grain occasionally in cash. If the family can afford it she may return to do massage up to $1\frac{1}{4}$ months after birth. In some families she will undertake massage for the first six to ten days after birth when the mother is considered most polluting after which time the Nai woman will be asked to do this work.

Generally the midwife will not wash the clothes a woman wears during birth and in most cases this is done by an older woman of the household. However the Jatav, Teli, Nai and Thakurs insist that, despite the expense, a washerwoman should be called from Indore or a neighbouring village to wash the clothes and criticise the other castes who do not think this practice is necessary. - This again seems to be something that is influenced by the different regional origin of these castes since it does not appear to be directly linked to their status. Jatav are low caste, the Nai and Telis are middle caste and the Thakurs are high caste. However the high status Brahmans and Rajputs, the middle status of Darzi and Garis and the low status Balai do not feel the washerwoman is necessary.[12]

The mother does not feed her new baby for up to three days after birth. In the meantime the baby is given a solution of sugar and water for nourishment. Generally the Brahman is consulted to determine an auspicious time for her to give the first feed. - All this time the mother remains inside the small room where she has given birth. She does this for two reasons - the first is that she is still extremely polluting and other members of the household avoid touching her as much as possible. One informant described how members of the household would leave food for the new mother some distance on the ground away from the woman to avoid too close proximity to her.

The second reason for a mother remaining secluded this time is the fear that mother and child will be affected by <u>havā</u> - literally 'air'. As with beliefs about the placenta informants are reticent about commenting directly on the dangers of <u>hava</u>. Some women, particularly those with some exposure to visiting medical workers will state firmly that <u>hava</u> - is cold air and a new mother will take a chill if she ventures out of the house too soon.[13] However <u>hava</u> is also the word used if it is thought that someone has been

affected by a dakin (a witch), a curail (a woman who has died an untimely death either by committing suicide, or having died in childbirth) or the evil eye. Other women state openly that a woman and child are in particular danger from these forces after birth. - By keeping the woman inside and out of sight from all but the closest family and friends the danger is thought to be averted. Additional precautions taken by most families include decorating the child with lampblack to make it unattractive to the spirits; and making sure that in this post birth period there is always someone in the house besides the mother and child, although the mother is not usually in the same room as the mother and child. A mother may also have a small iron knife attached to the fold of her sari as evil spirits are thought to be discouraged by the presence of iron. This is comparable to iron knife tied in the bride's sari for protection.

A woman's seclusion and the period of greatest impurity ends with the sūraj puja fifteen days after birth. However she remains polluting and may not enter the cooking area, or temple or fetch water for $1\frac{1}{4}$ months after birth. Women explain this period of pollution by stressing the physical secretions of after birth and they compare it directly with menstruation. Most say that immediately after birth the mother feels tired and welcomes the rest that the taboos impose on her. However as they begin to feel stronger women comment on the boredom and frustration of remaining housebound. Most women seemed to feel that if the baby was a wanted baby - a boy, a first child, or first girl then the taboos imposed on them after birth were more than compensated by the ijjat - honour accorded to them by the rest of the family. Other women whose children died during this early period, or who had had a girl where a boy had been looked for described how lonely they felt - cut off from the normal round of household activity and how they might be accorded little respect by other members of the household,

especially if there had previously been tensions within the family.

Not all women observe the post birth taboos as strictly as others and there is a tendency for those who have had children in hospital and remained there ten days after birth to regard their time in hospital as the polluting period and to resume most normal tasks when they return home - some women even fetch water and cook before $1\frac{1}{4}$ months have passed. Whether they are able to do this will in part depend on the attitudes of other members of the family - since many men and women would hesitate to touch a woman so soon after birth, let alone eat food cooked by her. Men do not sleep with their wives until they have resumed cooking and fetching water.[14]

For the first three days after birth a woman is given nothing to eat and must drink as little as possible - otherwise it is believed that her abdomen will not return to its proper shape. After this she is encouraged to eat 'warm' foods particularly those containing jaggery and clarified butter - since the warmth of these foods is believed to encourage secretions from the womb and so ensure that a woman's womb becomes free of the pollution of afterbirth. Special cakes made of 'warm' fruit and other substances are made. The woman must also eat less salt, peppers and avoid meat and eggs if these are part of her diet. The traditional songs (see appendix 1) refer to the jethani - (Huselbrowi) making - sweets - presumably the 'warm' cakes that are still eaten. They also refer to the sas making something known as a carnā but no informant, not even the oldest midwife could tell us what these were except they were something to eat. Wadley (1975) working in the UP area described the 'charua' as a clay pot that had been filled with cow dung and barley seeds and water and was given to the new mother to drink. It seems likely that the carna referred to in the Malwa songs is something similar.

No formal announcement is made about the birth of the child and fathers may be shy to mention it directly. My landlord's wife gave birth - and in the morning he gave me the news by saying rather shyly 'We have a guest in the house'. However neighbours and others soon become aware. The woman who previously worked or sat on the verandah is no longer to be seen. A male member of the household will be despatched to the Brahman's house to get the child's horoscope. Similarly male members of the household will be sent to the city to buy the ingredients needed for the new mother's special foods. Also the midwife concerned will often spread the news to those she meets.

The only formal announcements made are to the woman's conjugal kin if the child is born in the maika and to the natal kin if the child is born in the sasural. Such announcements are generally made only in the case of a first child. An auspicious day - preferably in the bright half of the month (see appendix 2) is chosen and if the child has been born in the maika the Nai woman is asked to make a design on paper from a mixture of vermillion and water which contains among other things a pair of feet, an indication of the sex of the child, the name of the parents of the child, and if they are alive the paternal grandparents - or great grandparents. This pagli, as it is known, is then sent by the Nai to the girl's sasural. If the baby is born in the sasural then the sasural people may send a coconut wrapped in a cloth to the girl's maika.

Similarly when the suraj puja ceremony is held those invited will be notified by the Nai who will call distributing a small piece of jaggery and rice to those invited. Thus the transitional or liminal state that a woman enters at childbirth, in contrast to her status as a pregnant woman, excludes her from the temple and the worship of deities. She is cut off from contact with her caste mates and even after the birth is over may not touch or be touched by them.

She and her child are handled by a midwife whose contact she would normally shun. This liminal state seems almost to rob the woman of her status as a person.

SURAJ PUJA

Suraj puja - literally 'sun puja' takes place, as we have seen, some nine to fifteen days after the child's birth. It is the first occasion (theoretically at least) when the mother and baby come out of the seclusion of the inner room to the gaze of all. The number of guests invited will depend on the importance attached to the birth of the child, and the wealth of the family.

If the child is important then the number of guests invited may be large. The time of the puja will be fixed by the Brahman, it should be done on an auspicious day and in the bright half of the month. It should, for obvious reasons, be done during daylight. The ritual has two components - first the child and its mother come into the light and make offerings to the sun and then the child, and its mother, and sometimes its father and its siblings receive gifts of clothes and money from members of the woman's maika and certain members of her sasural (see below). Sometimes the actual puja will be done in daylight but the gift giving - may not take place until the evening when the guests from other villages have had a chance to arrive.

Before the puja the mother is dressed in her best sari - and she wears the white over sari of a bride on top of this. The Nai woman decorates her feet with vermillion. The Nai woman also makes a cauk on the floor of the verandah, and arranges a stool on top of this. (In some castes the baby's father's sister makes the cauk). The Nai woman then leads out the mother and child and helps the mother sit on the stool. She then retires to sit just behind the mother. In front of the stool seven small cakes made from wheat

flour and clarified butter have been arranged and the mother-throws each of these wheat cakes in seven different directions: towards the north, the south, the east, the west, the sky, the earth, and the sun. Then she sprinkles water on either side of herself and towards the sun and unwraps the baby who has been closely swaddled and shows it to the sun. This part of the ritual does not attract much attention from the villagers themselves and may, as mentioned earlier, be separated from the gift giving by a matter of hours - however in some instances it follows immediately afterwards.

The gift giving involves members of the woman's natal family who give gifts of clothing to the child and the mother of the child. - Opinions differ as to which of the girl's conjugal relatives should receive clothes. Often clothes will be given to her husband - especially if the presentation takes place in the sasural, clothes may also be given to the girl's sas, sasur and nanand (Hussi), and the siblings of the child if it has any. The baby's bũã (father's sister) will generally give the child some kind of jewellry - usually the small silver anklets a baby wears - or possibly a necklace. - The bua also has the task some time between the birth of the baby and the suraj puja of making a small swastik of vermillion on the door frame[15] - this ritual is referred to as sãttia in the songs but nowadays is only done by the most traditional families.

It is women of the woman's natal family who present the gifts to her. The first person to give is usually the woman's eldest brother's wife and she will be followed by the wives of the woman's other brothers, and then by the woman's sisters. The mother of the woman does not usually make a presentation unless the woman has no married brothers. The wives of brothers, and the sisters older than the woman will give gifts to the woman, her husband, and possibly other members of the woman's conjugal family as well as to the baby; while the younger sisters and wives of younger

brothers will give gifts only to the child. As each person presents the gift they make a tika on the mother's and baby's heads, drape the sari they are giving over the head of the mother and then give the small gifts to the baby. The Nai woman sitting just behind the woman helps in this process and as each person finishes their gift giving they pass a coin and some grain over the woman's head and hand it to the Nai woman and to the drummer. The Nai woman is kept busy during this time for a woman may receive as many as thirty or forty saris if her suraj celebration is a big one. and she cannot 'wear' all of these at once. The Nai woman therefore helps take them off after they have been draped over her. The Nai woman and other members of the family will also keep a careful eye on who gives which cloth - for the gifts, their estimated expense, and the donors are carefully noted (although not written down) by the women who will try to return them in kind at later ceremonies. The woman will probably only ever wear a few of the saris presented since most will be put into a trunk and kept for use at similar occasions.

When the final gift giving is finished the woman is free to get up and move about. The stool is removed, and a woman will dance over the spot to remove the cauk with her shuffling steps. After this the women may sit and sing and dance. If the gift giving takes place in the evening this may continue all night. If they were not fed before the ritual then the family will provide food for those invited at this point.

After suraj puja the news of birth may be the subject of other public celebration. Sometimes the women of the maika or sasural of the new mother may hold singing parties to celebrate the birth. The women will gather at the house of the girl's family after they have finished all the daily chores including cooking and eating the evening meal and sit and sing the jacca songs, examples of which are given in

appendix 1. After singing for two or three hours the women will return home. The girl's family may hold singing parties for five nights in succession - and indeed if a pagli has arrived and the child is a first born boy this is not uncommon. Just as the wailing of women for ten successive days after death seems to announce the death to all - so the singing of these jacca songs serves as a kind of announcement of birth. But it is noticeable that this singing does not normally occur until after the suraj puja and so there is a marked interval of time between the event of birth and its celebration in song.

The extent and elaboration of the suraj puja and the singing parties described above depends on the wealth of the family, and the degree to which the child was wanted. Generally there is always more elaboration and celebration for the birth of the first born child, for the birth of a first born boy, and for the birth of a child to a 'barren' couple. In one case during my stay a son had been born to a man - whose first wife was barren and whose second wife waited seven years for a son. He was wealthy and gave a feast for his village caste mates, and his caste mates from surrounding villages some three months after the birth of this son. However a celebration to such an extent is unusual.

Suraj puja seems to redefine the ties of a woman with others and defines the baby's place in a chain of social prestations.[16] However the woman is not completely integrated back into the normal social world for she cannot enter the temple, or cook, or fetch water for others.

Although a woman is given gifts at the suraj puja she does not have quasi-deity status. The gifts are not distributed as prasad.[17] The ritual centres round the woman worshipping the sun rather than honour being paid to her. This makes the suraj puja somewhat different to the god bharai ritual where the woman is as if a deity. The difference reflects the differing kinds of liminality that

childbirth and pregnancy involve.

A woman's impurity lessens with time during the 1¼ month period after birth. Initially she will not wear the bangles and toe rings that she wore during birth - as these are considered polluted by birth and will be thrown away. However after the suraj puja she may be given new bangles and toe rings - although some women prefer to wait until the end of the one and quarter months to start wearing these ornaments again. The visits of the Nai woman for massage instead of the midwife are another sign that the woman's impurity is lessening.

JAL MATA PUJA (Water Mother Worship)

A woman's final integration back into the social world is marked by the offerings she makes to Jal Mata (Water Mother). 1¼ months after the birth she takes a bath and then goes to the well with offerings of food for Jal Mata. After this she draws water and brings it to the house presenting it first to her father-in-law as head of the household. She may then resume all household duties.

Before a woman has a baby, members of her husband's household rarely call her by her name. She is known as lari (bride). Her husband will not refer to her directly if he can help it. After she has had a baby a woman is often referred to as 'mother of x', where x is the name of her son or daughter. This change in naming practice reflects the way a woman's position in her conjugal household is initially defined with reference to her husband but after birth it is her link as a mother of one of the household's children that is given significance, in naming practices at least.

THE MUL CEREMONY

The above description is a summary of the rituals and taboos that normally surround birth. As we have seen the role of the father is not marked in any of them. The mul ritual (referred to in chapter 3) is different. This is only performed if, after consultation with the Brahman it is considered that the child, is bhir (literally 'heavy') for the father. If the ritual is not performed then the father will suffer misfortune.

A father is never shown the face of his child until the Brahman has been consulted about the horoscope. If a mul ritual is declared necessary then the father will not see the face of the baby until twenty seven days after birth. He will also refrain from shaving. No suraj puja will be held because it is considered unlucky for other male members of the baby's family to see the baby before the twenty seven days are up. Twenty seven days after birth a ritual involving the mother and father of the child is performed. In it the Brahman does a puja to the sacred fire and the father is shown the baby's face in oil before looking at it directly. This is said to remove any ill effects that the baby may have entailed for the father. If a mul ritual is performed, mamera is brought after mul. In this case it is the mul ritual that marks the baby's and the mother's first aggregation into the social world.[18]

SECTION 2: ANALYSIS

THE STATUS OF PHYSICAL BIRTH

The low status of physical birth can be seen in two ways: it is associated with pollution and with silence and seclusion. As we have seen in previous chapters, within Hindu thought organic processes such as menstruation and menarche are represented as powerful but low status when compared to purely social events such as marriage. Death is

polluting on the same principle. However the silence and seclusion surrounding birth itself deserve further attention for these are not always associated with states of pollution and seem to be a way of denying status to one aspect of motherhood and birth while allowing status to be given to other aspects. In order to demonstrate this it is necessary to show that this silence and seclusion are not just products of liminal states involved in transitions. The contrast between the rituals surrounding birth and those of marriage and death shows this, as do the contrasts between a woman's seclusion during the period when she gives birth and her public display in the rituals of pregnancy and those nine to fifteen days after birth.

Death is polluting but not isolating. In contrast to the privacy of birth, death is a public event. 'It is significant in the Hindu scheme that the rituals performed at death are not included in the category of domestic rituals. Indeed the Hindu scheme does not consider death to be an event primarily involving the domestic group. This is shown by the fact that ideally a Hindu should not die in his house but on the ghats of the sacred rivers (Das 1977: 8). In Ambakhedi few people expressed the desire to die on the ghats but if someone appears to be dying close relatives and friends come and gather at the house. The body is taken out to the cremation ground as soon as possible after death and again this is a public event with as many male villagers and caste mates as possible participating. This contrasts with the way in which people take care to avoid a house in which birth is taking place and the delay between birth and the first public exposure of mother and child.

Immediately after death a house is marked by the noise of women wailing. This wailing should theoretically last from morning until night for the ten or eleven days of impurity after death. Additional noise at death is sometimes created by hiring a band to lead the funeral procession to

the cremation ground. The noise of the event serves to make it public. It impinges on the awareness of those within earshot. Birth as we have seen should be a silent event and although women do mark it by singing they do not usually commence their singing until after the greatest period of impurity is over ie. until after suraj puja.

At death although the chief mourner ie. the man who lights the pyre and the wife of the chief mourner and a widow are expected to remain in the house as much as possible, unlike the new mother and baby they are visited by many people. Women, especially older women, put their hands on the heads of the bereaved to comfort them. One villager was deeply shocked on being shown a picture of an Indian widow prostrate with grief and apparently alone (the picture had been taken by an anthropologist from another area). His immediate reaction was 'why is she alone? why has no-one put their hands on her head?' This seems different from the effect of pollution that occurs at birth where family members will leave food at a distance from the new mother to avoid touching her.

Presentations of cloth to the corpse occur immediately after death and the corpse is also 'fed', in that food is put into its mouth. At birth the baby is not given milk for three days. It is not the subject of gifts until the nine or so days after birth. Gifts of clothes, and receiving food from others emphasise an individual's membership of kin and caste groupings. At death the corpse's membership of these groups, that is his social status is symbolised immediately. At birth the child has no social status. Its existence in what Das refers to as 'differentiated time' (Das 1977: 87), seems eventually to lead to a more defined status. The child drinks milk, its relationship to its mother is defined and later it becomes the subject of gift giving. While at death thecorpse moves from a position in the social order to one in the cosmic order a new child is completely asocial for initially it has status in neither order. This is perhaps

the clue to the contrasts between the liminal states surrounding birth and death.

'At first the dead Hindu is (in Sanskrit) a preta, a departed until at the end of the mourning he becomes a pitr, father, ancestor. The mourning period corresponds in the belief to a marginal state of the departed spirit intermediate between the world of the living and the world of the dead' (Dumont and Pocock 1959: 11). In Malwa members of the household where death occurs and other agnates of the deceased are thought to be impure for eleven days after the death of a woman and ten days after the death of a man (see chapter 7), this time marking the most intense period of mourning. This period is not just a transitional period for the deceased but also for the relations left behind whose position in the patrilineage changes, - the eldest son becomes head of the household and the wife becomes a widow etc.

Thus at death the corpse is incorporated into the category ancestor with a place in the cosmic order. The ancestors with their relation to lineage and household have a defined position with regard to the 'moral community'. The corpse passes from one position in the community to another and the ties of the corpse to the community are made evident at every stage. Birth, in contrast, involves a position being created where there was none before. Gradually from a state of not-being (if such a state can be said to exist) the baby becomes incorporated into the 'moral community', its complete incorporation only finally being accomplished at marriage as we have seen in previous chapters. The silence and seclusion surrounding physical birth itself serve to convey this sense of non being and suggest that it is not birth itself but some other more public event that will ultimately give the child a defined position with the 'moral community'. As a result women's physical maternity is represented as relatively insignificant and something that takes place outside the confines of the 'moral community'. That it takes place caukebahar, ie. outside the kitchen which marks the

place where the food that serves to link the household together is prepared, emphasises the isolation surrounding birth.

The contention that birth sets a woman outside the 'moral community' seems to be upheld by the kind of pollution involved at birth when this pollution is compared to that involved at death. The pollution attached to death is physically contagious in the sense that those who touch others polluted by death will wash before performing tasks such as cooking or going to the temple. Death pollution also has another aspect. Agnatic relatives within a defined group are polluted by the death whether or not they come into contact with the dead body. The deceased spreads pollution by virtue of his or her position in the social order. In the Malwa region birth pollution is simply contagious, it does not have what Orenstein (1968: 116) has called a 'relational' aspect.. Orenstein describes this 'relational' pollution as occurring at birth in other areas of India (ibid. 116) but there was no evidence for it in Ambakhedi. The 'relational' aspect of death pollution seems to reflect a situation the corpse passes from a defined position in this social order to a position of ancestor within the larger social order. The absence of such pollution at birth reflects the asocial status of the new child.

The mul ritual is interesting, for here an individual is affected by the birth of the child not through physical contact with the new born but by virtue of the relationship in which the fatherstands to the baby. However whether or not a mul ritual is necessary depends on the reading of the child's horoscope. The child's horoscope, related as it is to the timing of conception and birth, places these events within an ordered framework, of 'differentiated' time that Das refers to (Das 1977). It is the child's position within this pattern of time, which is part of the cosmic order which determines whether a father should observe certain restrictions or not. Birth per se is represented as an organic

process which is only polluting in the context of physical contact. It is only its position in structured time that makes it an event that has ramifications over and above the physical. Men are not associated with birth when it does not impinge on the structured, ordered processes of which they are part. It is women, particularly mothers who are associated with the unstructured, asocial forces involved in physical birth.

Marriage contrasts with birth not only because it is pure while birth is polluting but because it is public while birth itself is private. Informants gave one reason for the seclusion of mother and baby as the need to protect the mother and baby from the evil eye and from spirits but in a marriage this is not the form of protection. A bride or groom like the new baby and the mother wear iron for protection but their additional protection involves them always being in the company of others - for them it is solitude and seclusion which is dangerous. Although the bride and groom are not adult members of the 'moral community' they do have a distinct status with regard to it and just as death involves a public display of social relationships at all times so marriage involves similar displays.

The central rites of a wedding involve the bride and groom worshipping Mai Mata. The bride's sari is tied to the groom's loin cloth. After this the bridal pair come outside the house and take the 'seven steps' around the sacred fire. The Brahman is the ritual specialist in both these events, in contrast to the low caste midwife who oversees birth. The khvansi and khvansa attend and assist at both events. Both events are witnessed by male and female members of the family and any guests who care to watch. At birth, as we have seen, as few people as possible are present.

A wedding is marked by noise. It is prestigious to hire a band from the city. During the crucial stages of marriage the Brahman repeats sacred mantras. During the

worship of Mai Mata small girls sit behind the couple and rattle coins. Mayer reports how in one Malwa village there is 'clapping and shouting' at this event (Mayer 1973: 229). Above all once the groom's party have arrived the bride is encouraged to cry. She is said to have no sarm if she remains silent. A silent bride is thought to be happy at leaving her parental home and over eager to go to her husband's. The quiet sobs of a bride at the crucial stages of marriage are therefore in contrast to the silent mother during the physical pain of birth.

It is debatable how far it is a natural event for any mother in any culture to be encouraged to be silent during birth. For the purposes of this argument what is relevant is that it forms an important part of the way in which informants talk about birth and thus of their social construction of the event. The emphasis is on the supression of noise and hence on a woman's ability to express the pain and emotions she may be feeling. There is an awareness that she may want to cry but it is an emotion which should not be expressed publicly because the pain and difficulties of a woman in labour are not significant and should not be significant in a wider context. This contrasts with the feeling that a woman should cry at marriage whatever she is feeling. The emotions a woman has at being separated from her natal kin do have an important function in the social order of things, and are socially significant.

To review, physical birth is an event characterised by pollution, silence and seclusion. This seems to mark the way that birth gives a baby physical existence but of itself this physical existence has no status in the 'moral community'. A woman's power to give birth is expressed as separate from her power and involvement of that baby's integration into the social world and thus what is perhaps the most important aspect of physical sexuality is represented as degrading and isolates her from other women and from

the rest of the community. Positive associations to do with birth come from suraj puja and god bharai and when the mother-to-be and later the mother and baby are involved with defining their position in the community but this is kept contextually separate from the event of birth itself. Wadley has suggested that in Hindu thought 'In her very biology, a biology necessary for motherhood but not for wifehood the mother is a contradiction' (Wadley 1977: 124). The contradiction may be one that is apparent to Western eyes because of the relationship that we see between biological and social maternity - although there are links between the two in Hindu thought the contextual separation between physical and social maternity may make the contradiction less apparent. The pollution, silence and seclusion are an important part of this process.

It is not a universal cross-cultural fact that everywhere female reproductive powers are represented as highly polluting or something that is women's business and must be concealed. In a West African tribe described by Hoffer (1972) women use the knowledge and power to give birth as a political bargaining tool. In some cultures men may take control of birth by ensuring that male experts oversee it.[19] In Ambakhedi birth is not controlled by men in this way and woman cannot use it as a resource to bargain with men - instead it is a private experience isolating women from one another and cutting them off from interaction with others.

Helen Callaway(1978) has suggested that while in matrilineal societies there are sometimes myths which suggest the denial of physiological paternity; in patrilineally organised societies where the tie between father and children must be pre-eminent the rituals surrounding birth will sometimes amount to a 'denial of physiological maternity'. The female contribution is devalued, because, to value it would necessitate women and the link between women and children being given more status than the social structure allows.[20]

The pollution and the silence and seclusion of the birth rituals and the consequent devaluation of the process of giving birth thus ensures that women are not represented as having a high status power of their own which might threaten the order of the 'moral community'.

Within Ambakhedi certain links between women and their children are acknowledged. As suggested in chapter 3 the concern over the chastity of women is in part due to the fact that they do contribute something to caste membership of their children. In addition in cases where marriages break down it is not always clear with whom the children will remain. Although in theory they should remain with their father, I knew of several instances where a woman had left her husband and had taken her children with her. In one much discussed incident these children had then received some of the land of the woman's second husband although none of their real father's. This latter incident was unusual but women retaining their children in the event of a split was less so. Thus, underlying the patrilineal ideology of the community are contradictory norms and events to do with the ties between mothers and children. If the arguments of the Ardeners and Mary Douglas are correct and pollution does express 'a critical lack of fit between the male model and a discrepant model which the actions of women force on the attentions of men' (Ardener, S. 1977: 51, n19) then the pollution beliefs surrounding birth would seem to reflect the devaluation of female reproductive power and the threat this power poses.[21]

The emphasis on privacy and silence at birth may also be compared to emphasis on the concealment of any signs of physical affection between husband and wife and informants seem to link it in this way themselves. The sexual act itself as in most cultures takes place in privacy but in addition in many parts of rural India it is considered wrong for husband and wife to show any signs of affection in public. Jacobson and others have linked this

to the necessity of subordinating the bond between husband and wife to the wider interests of the patrilineal household. If loyalty between husband and wife becomes more important than loyalty to the patrilineal household then the existence of this household is endangered (see chapter 2). By concealing affection a statement is made about the necessity of subordinating this relationship to the needs of the household. The privacy surrounding birth seems to indicate something about the need to suppress the importance of a woman's powers to reproduce.

Breast feeding is not the subject of any concealment and women do it openly and in all places. This may be because breast feeding is essentially about giving food, and exchanges of food mark social relationships in many other contexts, and thus breast feeding does not represent a power that is set apart from the principles that order the 'moral community' in the way that birth itself does. Everyone can give food if necessary but only women can have babies. By giving physical birth low status men's dependence on women is masked.[22]

SOCIAL MATERNITY

While birth is concealed the rituals of *god bharai* and *suraj* puja are not. This seems to be because they are associated with the social aspects of maternity and in the case of *suraj* with the child's integration into the social world. These are relatively pure events which make a woman part of the 'moral community' and associate her with the principles which govern this community. An examination of these rituals show how this is conveyed and the nature of the power involved.

GOD BHARAI

This is the first ritual which marks the change of status of the young married woman to motherhood. It occurs only once which suggests that once a woman has a child her status is changed irrevocably. In chapter 5 the way in which a woman acquires mature social sexuality was described, this ritual conducted during a woman's first pregnancy seems to concern the fulfillment of the social sexuality a woman acquires at marriage.

The structure of the ritual can be interpreted as follows. In offering the coconut in front of her, the father-in-law of the household sets her apart and marks her as sacred. This compares with the way in which the sagai ceremonies, other ceremonies conducted in the bride's village, and gifts by the father-in-law marked the bride as different and placed her in a liminal state in which she undergoes transformation. It contrasts with the liminal polluting status birth itself creates. In god bharai the girl is then the object of gifts from older married women suggesting that these women also have a part to play in her change of status as they did in the wedding. Finally she makes offerings to the gods in her husband's village and marks her return to normal status by touching the feet of her father-in-law while he gives her money as he did when she entered the household at the conclusion of marriage ceremonies. It is perhaps noteworthy that the father of the child-to-be is not involved in this ritual at all, the role of the father-in-law suggests that event concerns the girls relation to her conjugal household which her father-in-law represents rather than her relation with her husband.

It can be objected that since the timing of the event is the seventh month of pregnancy it is the physical change in status which is being honoured. The symbolism of the lap could also be interpreted as a symbol of physical pregnancy. When a woman stands up clutching the end of her

sari to her so that she can carry all the objects that have been filled in her lap the bulge this makes bears a striking resemblance to the pregnant stomach. The lap in which the gifts are placed is the place where the child will sit during suraj puja. A woman sitting cross-legged with her child in her lap is one of the most common sights in the village.

However just as the meta-birth described at marriage is different from birth itself - so here too there are some important differences. Firstly pregnancy is a sign that a woman is about toproduce a child and the woman changes status in this way before she produces the child not because she has produced it. It is her potential involvement in the creation of a new individual that is honoured and this links it less firmly to the event of birth than might otherwise be the case. After birth she is given gifts but she is not treated by her husband's family as she is at god bharai. Secondly, the key participants in this event marking a woman's transition to motherhood are her father-in-law and other married women. Physical pregnancy requires a man and a woman - preferably husband and wife, but the husband and wife relationship is notably absent from this ritual. Thirdly, the lap itself as was argued in chapter five need not be a symbol of the relation between genitrix and offspring but can rather symbolize a relationship between mater and offspring. It is a symbol of a filial relationship that is socially manipulable.

The dictionary indicates the social nature of this filial relationship. God lena (to take the lap) means to adopt, and god dena (to give the lap) means to give away in adoption. There is one ritual in the village which indicates in a very striking way the way that this relation is socially manipulable. If a woman has a sickly child, or has borne a child after a long period of waiting she will be anxious about the welfare of the child. Believing that her kismat (fate) is tied up with that of the child she may decide to give the child to another woman. The woman in

question may be chosen for one of two reasons. The first is that she may have brought up strong healthy children herself in which case it is thought that that woman's kismat can influence the health of the baby. Alternatively the child may be given to barren, childless or low caste sweeper women it is thought that such a woman is so unfortunate she will not attract the evil eyes of others and the child will be safe. Before the child is married it must be 'bought back' from the woman to whom it has been given so that the parents of the child can give her away in marriage. They cannot give what is not theirs. The buying back takes place as follows. The woman who has been given the child ie. the foster mother sits on a stool placed on a cauk. The child, usually by this time as old as ten or twelve, sits in her lap. The real mother of the child presents the foster mother with clothes and money. The money is seen as payment of the child and when it has been handed over the child moves from the lap of her foster mother to the lap of her real mother.

Apart from illustrating the way in which the lap can symbolize a social relationship between mother and child this ritual also suggests that through exchange women can transfer aspects of maternity between one another. In the god bharai ritual the bride places gifts in the lap of married women in her conjugal household and in the laps of her husbands married sisters. These women, most of whom are mothers, then place the gifts in the woman's lap. This suggests that the mother-to-be is involved in some transfer of power between these women and herself and that this power is connected with maternity.

To review then, the head of the household honours the woman and marks her as liminal and sacred. Women who stand in close relation to the household either as wife or sister are then involved in some kind of transfer of power. These are married women who are mothers themselves. In the case of married woman of the woman's household, they have

probably born children into the household themselves. In the case of married sisters their children belong to another household but as we have seen in chapter five, they stand in a special auspicious relation to household and their femaleness is not tainted with the negative connotations that may surround a wife. The implication is that in this exchange of gifts a woman acquires some maternal powers that are closely related to her conjugal household and involvement in it and are entirely auspicious. In contrast to the event of birth itself what she shares with these other women is emphasised and here the event identifies her interests with the wives and sisters of the household, and so with the non polluting auspicious aspects of femaleness. In birth and afterwards alone with low caste midwife in a liminal area of the house she is not made to feel part of this group of women in the same way.

The timing of god bharai does give implicit recognition to the physical change in a woman during pregnancy. What is honoured however is her place within that household and her shared identity with women connected with the household. Her individual relation with her husband is given scant recognition and the auspicious aspects of her maternity are linked to these other women. Thus the socially manipulable role of mater is honoured while the relations and powers involved in the linked role of genitrix arerecognised but scarcely acknowledged. It is a woman's position in her conjugal household and the powers of social sexuality she acquires from other married women that give her a role in the creation of the 'moral community' not her physical sexuality per se. Her obeisance to her father-in-law suggests that although her status changes it does not make her superior in status and the money her father-in-law gives indicates that he is paying her for some aspect of her power.

SURAJ PUJA

The first recognition that mother and child have an existence in the social world occurs nine to fifteen days after birth when the mother marks the end of her total seclusion by worshipping the sun which she will not have seen before this time and neither will her baby. Thus contact with the social world and the first recognition of the baby as social being are separated from the event of birth by fifteen days, or longer in the event of the mul ritual. Time serves to separate the physical event from the social consequences.

More significant than this ritual is the giving of mamera on this occasion. These are gifts given to the new mother, and also, sometimes to her husband's parents. They take the form of clothes. They are given by members of the mother's natal family and sometimes by the members of other natal families of the new mother's household. This presentation is similar to mamera given at weddings (although the scale may not be so elaborate)[23] and this similarity is of interest. It links a woman's role as a mater to marriage rather than to the event of birth itself and therefore represents the honoured aspects of motherhood as social rather than physical.

It was argued in chapter 5 that mamera at weddings expresses principles of both consanuinity and affinity. This involves not only by the identification of a group of wife givers who give gifts to a wife taking group, but also in the name given to the event and the circumstances surrounding it there is implicit recognition that the wife giving group is providing wives and therefore indirectly providing children at the same time. At a wedding the bride and groom do not receive gifts known as mamera from the bride's natal family. Gifts are given by them but they are not known as mamera. It is other members of the spouse's household who receive mamera and the mamera is given by the natal families

of the household's other women. A bride receives mamera for the first time from her natal family either at the birth of her first child or at the wedding of a member of the conjugal household, whichever occurs first. Her position as member of her husband's wife-taking group rather than as a member of a wife-giving group is first demonstrated either at the meta-birth of a member of her husband's household ie. their marriage, or when her own child is introduced to the world and begins to be incorporated into the 'moral community'. The honoured aspect of social maternity is thus associated with her membership of her husband's household and her married status. That mamera is given both at the meta-birth of a spouse at marriage and at the introduction of the child to the community makes suraj puja and the associated mamera parallel the events of marriage in some way. The parallel is perhaps that both are connected with the creation of a position for the child in the 'moral community'. The event of birth itself is presented as a separate process.

Gift giving known as mamera after the suraj puja does not make a woman the same kind of object of respect as it does in god bharai because it does not change her in the same way, however it does give public recognition to her role as member of a wife taking group. The way that this is done - ie. only after her baby is introduced to the wider community, and the way it is associated with the marriage ceremony suggests that it is her social role as mother/wife which is honoured and not her physical reproductive powers. These are devalued while powers and status associated with marriage are honoured.

Pregnancy and giving birth thus involve women in two different kinds of state - that of pollution silence and seclusion, and that of the honour and display surrounding god bharai and suraj and mamera. The contrasts between the symbolism surrounding the event of birth, and between the rituals of pregnancy and those of a woman and baby after

birth, together with the timing of these rituals seem to separate out the functions and processes involved in becoming a mother. This means that what we see as a contradiction between the low status given to female reproductive powers and the high status of motherhood is not so apparent. The status of mater is made to appear less contingent on a woman's physical reproductive powers than might otherwise be the case. Motherhood can thus be a desirable role while giving birth itself is low status and degrading.

In demonstrating that the taboos surrounding the actual event of parturition are of a different order then the taboos surrounding liminal periods at marriage and death it has been shown that it is not simply that god bharai and suraj puja involve stages when a woman is more part of the community while at birth she is completely liminal. The nature of liminality varies according to the nature of transition. Marriage, god bharai and suraj can be elaborate and public while birth is private, and unelaborate because the principles which they express do not conflict with the principles which order the moral community.[24] God bharai and suraj associate a woman with a defined place in the community which does not threaten the order of the community so they can be elaborate and public while birth is not.

JAL PUJA: THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE END OF LIMINALITY

Just as the nature of a woman's liminality during birth conveys something about the status given to the powers involved so the way in which a woman is finally incorporated to a more neutral ritual state at the end of this liminal period is indicative. The jal puja performed by the mother at the end of her period of impurity after birth is almost exactly parallelled in the jal puja that is performed by both the bride and the mothers of the bride and groom when all the marriage rituals have been completed. After birth the new mother goes to the well, washes and makes certain

offerings to it. She then draws water and brings it back for her father-in-law to drink. After a wedding when the new bride is installed in her husband's home and has completed all the marriage rituals the bride and her mother-in-law go to the well to 'cool' the ritual objects used in the marriage ceremony and both draw water and present it to the head of the household for him to drink. The head of the household may present the bride with money for this service. The bride's mother performs a similar ritual in her own household.

This act of bringing water seems to typify the services that wife must perform for her husband's household. Its symbolism is incorporated into the rite that is performed when a secondary marriage takes place. Nathra (the second marriage of a woman, see chapter 3) takes place in private - usually at night and without a Brahman. Unfortunately I was unable to witness such a ceremony. However time and time again I was told that in such a case after the new husband had paid money to the girl's parents the woman would go to thewell of the new husband and draw water from it. She would then go to the new husband's house and he would take the pot off her head and the two would enter the house. That completes the rite. Thus the form of second rite is stripped of all the other ritual trappings except for this simple service that the girl performs for her new husband indicating its significance.

Crooke writes that 'in India....water is the prime source of fertility' (Crooke 1926: 4 cit. Selwyn 1979: 695). The context of the occasions when women perform jal puja would seem to link it to the production of new life. It occurs at the end of the marriage rituals. - Here the mothers of the spouses have as it were given birth to adult sons and daughters, and it occurs after birth. The bride is now a wife, a junior member of her husband's lineage. - To bring water for someone is to show them

respect. Men of a household will not do it unless no woman are available and the men of a few households in the village who regularly fetched the family's water because of the ill health or laziness of their wives were laughed at. So at completion of the birth and marriage rites women are presented as bringing an essential commodity for the family but the bringing of this commodity does not place them in a high status position but rather confirms their low status position.[25]

It may be that it is significant that water is associated with more than the power to produce life. It has other symbolic properties. It can make objects that have become sacred, either through extremes of pollution or purity, less sacred. In doing so it can integrate objects and people back into the 'moral community'. At the end of the marriage rituals a bride marks her termination of her position as a quasi deity by 'cooling'(thanda karna) the marriage ritual objects and bringing water for her father-in-law. After birth she finally loses her association with pollution and powerful bad-sacred forces[26] by washing herself in water and then bringing water and then bringing water for her father-in-law. In one case water is used to 'cool' and in the other to 'clean'. In both cases the power of the sacred world seems to be neutralised and the woman ceases to be in a liminal state. A woman is powerful when she is liminal but she puts an end to this liminality by washing herself and then brining water a substance which can remove her liminality.

As wife she brings water for men in a ritually neutral state, that is a state that is not sacred. She brings water at the termination of periods when she is classified as sacred. This seems to imply her ultimate commitment to this ritually neutral state and that her ability to change from one status to the other is one that is ultimately subordinated to men. However the symbolism of water itself implies not only her 'subordination' but

her ability to become insubordinate and powerful and that ability is a vital part of her function. - She is represented as part of the 'moral community' but also able to step outside it.

A woman as water carrier is never worshipped in her own right but there is one ritual that occurs locally where the woman as water carrier is honoured albeit indirectly. Most adults in the village will try at least once in their life to make a pilgrimage to the Ganges. The villagers refer to this river as Ganga Mata. A pilgrimage to the Ganges is believed to release members of the household from performing yearly ancestor rites until such time as someone else in the household dies. So, an older married couple will make such a pilgrimage in an attempt to fulfill their religious obligations. It is customary for those who make such a pilgrimage to return with sealed pots of Ganges water. These are kept in the temple until such time as the family decides to perform a ritual in their honour. A Brahman is paid to do this and it is usually done as part of the marriage ceremonies. This pattern seems to occur elsewhere (Nayudu, S. pers. comm.).

However the locally distinctive feature attached to this ritual are the events that occur after the Brahman has performed the main ritual. During the main ritual the Brahman opens the sealed pot of Ganges water and empties the water into a number of smaller pots. This ritual takes place outside the centre of the village. These pots of water are then given to various young women (married and unmarried) who have the task of carrying them back into the village. They do this bearing the pots on their heads. Coconuts are placed in the pots. As the girls process back into the village they become 'possessed' and started making violent gestures and swaying about. Ganga Mata is said to have come 'into them'. They are worshipped as personnifications of the goddess. On the occasion I observed this ritual there were

thirteen girls carrying the water pot and all became possessed. The entire village gathered to watch the procession and various men and women came forward from the onlookers to make offerings to the goddess. So far I have not been able to find descriptions of an event quite like this but older informants remembered such cases when they were children and so it does not seem to be a new event.

Here woman as the water carrier, that is displaying her power to mediate by cooling and purifying, is worshipped. It is not as wife or mother she is worshipped, for here she is not a goddess for the goddess has 'come into' her. Nevertheless the goddess is known as Mata (mother). Her power is associated with water. This seems interesting in the light of other evidence discussed here. The power that enables women to move from one category of the 'sacred' to another outside profane or ritually neutral categories is honoured. This power is crucial for women in their roles as wife and as mother (motherhood in both its physical and social aspects). Here this power is associated with 'good sacred' forces and is worshipped by men and women. Social and physical maternity are linked by water and incorporated within the role of wife. The ability of women to mediate between categories is in the end subordinated to men but the symbol that represents a woman's service to man implies her ability to become liminal and more powerful. The Ganga Mata ritual seems to reflect the significance of this power.

CONCLUSION

In the chapter on marriage it was argued that women possess a social sexuality that is analagous to their physical powers of reproduction but distinct from it. In marriage only the meta-sexual powers are evident. At birth both women's physical sexuality and her social sexuality are evident but the timing and nature of the rituals surrounding these different kinds of powers imply that the powers, though

related, are distinct and that social maternity has higher status than physical maternity.

The low status and concealment surrounding birth itself suggest that if this process were to be given high status it would threaten the order of the 'moral community' where men are ultimately in control and male power is most significant. Honouring social maternity does not threaten the community since social maternity is linked to marriage and a woman's ties to her conjugal family. Ultimately her access to social sexuality and maternity is dependent on men and does not present a threat to them. Men can not control physical maternity in the same way.

The importance of the symbolism of water is not just that water is a symbol of growth and reproduction. Water has the power to put an end to liminality. In the process of transition a woman becomes powerful and liminal. As a bride, a woman giving birth, or woman assisting in a wedding she becomes set apart from normal social life and this sacred state enables her to take part in the process of physical and/or social reproduction. However water symbolises her ability to integrate herself into normal social life and therefore to make these liminal events serve the interest of the ordered 'moral community'. That she is paid for bringing water after birth and marriage and that on special occasions Ganga Mata, a water goddess, possesses her and is worshipped suggests this power of integration is important. However since the woman herself is not worshipped and she is paid for the service rather than honoured in the last resort this power which is crucial in the creation of the community is also devalued for a woman in her daily life does not exercise this power. The symbolism of water does suggest that it is the woman herself who is instrumental in incorporating herself back into the community and thus that the model of the taming and control of female powers is not the most relevant here.

Tom Selwyn has argued that 'A woman is conceptually linked with nature and natural forces, but the need for such female powers to be tamed and ordered by men seems to be stated insistently' (1979: 669). He writes 'By ascribing to each qualities that are different the marriage rites thus distinguish between men and women and having done so, integrate them with one of the partners of the dyad subordinate to the other' (ibid.). Although Selwyn is right in emphasising the different quality of male and female power - as I have indicated it is perhaps simplistic to see women as being identified purely with 'natural forces'. In addition the use of a word such as tamed presents women as forces who play little part in their own taming but are constantly controlled by men. According to the OED (1951) the English word 'tame' means to 'make gentler and tractable, domesticate...subdue, curb, reduce to submission'. What the word fails to imply is the role of women in identifying themselves with the interests of the 'moral community'. It is women who purify themselves and cool the sacred objects and thus integrate themselves back into the normal life of the 'moral community'. They have interests and powers that identify their interests with those of the 'moral community' even although they havesubordinate status within it. This subordinate status does not mean that men always control them although in the last resort they are dependent on men for certain important reasources. In seeing that female power is subordinate to male power, Selwyn seems to see this subordination as the means of control while I would argue that in the identification of the honoured aspects of women's states with the interests of the 'moral community' women themselves become committed to the 'moral community' and devalue aspects of their physical sexuality which place them at odds with it.

It can be seen from this that the overall status of women is the product of some complicated symbolic representations.

The contradiction between the much desired state of motherhood and the low status of wives has been noted in India as well as in other cultures. However if the social and physical aspects of maternity are seen as separable the contradiction becomes more comprehensible. By honouring the social aspects of maternity related to marriage, motherhood is seen as desirable but intimately linked with marriage and men. Women can only gain honour through their links with marriage and men. Like menstruation rituals, the rituals surrounding birth make female physical sexuality seem low status and degrading. Birth isolates women from one another, from their own caste mates and from menand it is not seen as a source of prestige or power. Thus the symbolism surrounding these rituals serves to subordinate the interests of women to those of the male oriented 'moral community' and they take part in their own subordination.

NOTES

1. For further discussion of this point see MacCormack et. al. in MacCormack 1982.

2. I am unsure why this was so since other ethnographers in other parts of India and South Asia have reported how informants gave metaphors as the seed and the field (eg. Dube 1972; Mayer 1973) when explaining reproduction, and also more complicated explanations related to notions in Ayruvedic medicine. It is possible that the unmarried childless state of my assistant and myself may have had something to do with it. Also I am unclear what the workers from the local Kasturbagram Trust who ran a small hospital nearby may have taught. It is possible that people were fearful of discussing traditional theories of reproduction in the presence of someone - ie. me, who was associated with these workers and who they occasionally approached for advice about modern medical techniques in the form of birth control pills and sterilisation. I regret not not having inquired more clearly into how women thought these modern techniques worked.

3. This contrasts with the dietary restrictions reported among Hindu Tamils in Sri Lanka by Dennis McGilvray where women were 'cautioned to avoid excessive amounts of 'cooling, eruptive or windy foods'' (1982: 36). However since pregnant women are thought to be in a heated condition in both locales and heat is associated with birth itself it is perhaps understandable that in Ambakhedi people think that excessive amounts of hot food during pregnancy will bring about miscarriage or premature delivery. For a more detailed account of the part that Ayurvedic medicine sees hot and cold humours playing in the process see McGilvray 1982.

4. Marriages among most castes are arranged so that wealth of families is usually more or less equal at the time the marriage is arranged (see chapter 2). However circumstances and family fortunes change and I knew of several instances where the wealth of a woman's maika and sasural had become unequal and the women were faced with this sort of choice about delivery.

5. Marriage rituals express the importance of fertility and children (see for example the discussions of the turmeric rubbing rituals in chapter 5). Moreover a married woman is never confirmed in her status as wife until she produces living children. A man will take another wife if the marriage is not fruitful. Children are needed to ensure the lineage continues and that a man has a son to perform his funeral rites. Once a woman has a child she will often be referred to by the term 'mother of y' where y stands for the name of her son, again marking a change in her position in the household. These additional factors seem to justify the interpretation of god bharai an extension of the wedding rituals and part of the woman's final incorporation into her husband's household.

6. There are four older women in the village who are particularly in demand as midwives. Three are Balai and one is a Jatav. One of those interviewed describes how she learnt her skills from her mother-in-law, another says after having three children herself she became interested in the work and attended some deliveries with older neighbours who were also midwives. One woman the mother of the man who becomes possessed by the goddess at the annual festival of Naumi (see Appendix 2) seems to be particularly popular with the high castes and has a reputation for great skill. Generally the Rajputs and the Garis will only call the Camar if no one else is available. This is because they are leatherworkers and their association with dead cows and other animals makes them more impure than the Jatav.

   These midwives also perform midwifery services among their own castes and the only group in the village who are not serviced by them are the Jatav. Both the Balai and Camar feel that the Jatav are more untouchable than they are. The result is that the Jatav call in midwives from a neighbouring village. (They also have to summon a barber from an outside village).

   The importance of the midwives has been recognised by those concerned with improving the standards of hygiene in traditional deliveries and various government and charitable schemes have been set up locally to provide the village midwives with rudimentary training in health care and hygiene. However in at the time of fieldwork the low caste women in Ambakhedi who had gone for such training were not the same women who were known as respected and competent village midwives. When choosing whom to call for a birth in the household women would either call a traditional midwife, or arrange for a birth in the hospital. The newly trained women were seen as having neither full traditional competence, nor as fully trained in modern medicine. This would suggest

that in training village women it is important that women are not just members of the village but are also fully competent in the traditional knowledge and skills about giving birth.

7. A study of obstetric practices and the hospital might also reveal some interesting points about the value placed on women's labour in less traditional Indian contexts for as Callaway (1978), Oakley (1976) and others have shown even the 'scientific' practices of Western medicine express something about the values attached to female reproductive power.

8. The women who do the midwifery work say that they do it partly for the payments of jaggery and wheat that are made for them. The women are all from the poorer families of the village. Talking about their work with them one also gains an impression that they enjoy the exercise of their skills and the position of authority that the skill gives them over other women. - One commented 'Normally the sas of family x screams abuse at me if I even walk near her cattle pen but at delivery I am sent for. Sometimes they become so confused and worried I am even allowed near the stove to get water if there is no one else to help me'. - For some individuals at least some of the satisfaction of the midwifery work appears to come from the reversal in status that the event of delivery implies. Midwives are from groups that normally do labouring work for high caste landlords. Here their skill means that although they are working for someone else they are basically in command of the situation.

9. Other reasons for preferring hospital birth include the perceived superiority of modern medical techniques, and the fact that if birth takes place in the hospital there are no polluting biproducts to deal with in the home. This parallels the attitude of British Gypsy women to hospitals in the UK (Okely 1977: 178).

In addition midwives may sometimes be unwilling to deal with what the villagers see as their traditional tasks. The midwives acknowledge that midwifery is polluting work and one has given it up for this reason. Another has cut down on the number of deliveries because she feels it is not in keeping with her status as woman pamc. Two women claim that they do not cut the cord at delivery - in their view this is the most polluting of all tasks. Formerly they did this. These moves are mainly by the Balai midwives and are seen as a whole

series of activities by which the Balai are trying to raise their status (see chapter 2). The upper castes are anxious to avoid confrontation of this sort and hospital birth removes the need for such confrontation.

10. Unfortunately I was not able to attend a birth myself although I had expressed interest in doing so. My age, and childless unmarried state seemed to be the main restriction together with the women's desire to have as few people as possible present at the birth itself. In addition I failed to ask more detailed questions about posture of the mother during delivery and other more detailed obstetric practices. I am aware that discussions of modern births have shown that these can be important in understanding how the event of birth is represented and that the 'stranded beetle position' adopted by Western women has been a case in point (see for example Kitzinger 1982; Jones and Dougherty 1982 and Oakley 1976). The continuing interest of ethnographers in the circumstances surrounding birth will, it is hoped, provide more information on this subject at a later date.

11. It may be noted that in chaper five the rubbing of turmeric and oil was associated with the social sexuality of bride and groom. Turmeric was also associated with the power to purify. I failed to ask informants about why they thought the baby and mother needed this message at this time, however the circumstances of the massage indicate that it is probably associated with the cleaning the purifying processes that take place after birth and possibly with endowing mother and baby with the strength of power needed for both to regain their normal place in the community. The use of turmeric at birth and weddings adds support to the idea of the wedding as a meta-birth. The significance of the use of turmeric at birth itself cannot be explored further at this time because of lack of available evidence.

12. Mayer has also commented on the absence of a washerman in Malwa in general with respect to its effect on concepts of pollution. He writes 'Very few villages have a washerman, in contrast to Northern India. He is accounted low, about the equal of the drummer. It is not thought to be degrading to wash one's own clothes in Malwa, though it would be to wash anyone else's (cf. Hocart 1950: 2)' (Mayer 1973: 53 footnote 1).

13. Compare this with the following comments by McGilvray on birth in Sri Lanka: 'In short, there is very strong emphasis on 'heating' foods and substances in the post-natal diet, while at the same time, there is strict prohibition on fruits (generally cooling), milk and yoghurt (cooling). There is explicit anxiety that the new mother may suffer 'cool illnesses' (kuli varuttam), and this danger evidently arises from the abrupt loss of the mother's blood and bodily heat when the baby is born' (McGilvray 1982: 59).

14. If the child dies or is still born a woman is still supposed to observe $1\frac{1}{4}$ months of impurity but may not always do so; some women reported that they had observed ten to fourteen days pollution taboos and had then washed and resumed normal duties. In the case of a still born child or one who dies, suraj puja is not performed.

15. This was discussed in the previous chapter as part of the evidence which suggested that a married woman stood in a special auspicious relation to her natal household.

16. There is no formal name giving ceremony in Ambakhedi.

17. Prasad is the term used for food offered to gods in rituals and then distributed among the participants and other villagers.

18. For additional comments on the mul ceremony see its comparison with taboos observed at the menarche of an unmarried girl in Chapter 3.

19. Oakley has suggested that the development of birth practices in modern Western medicine is in part the development of a way in which men can control the reproductive powers of women. She writes 'Perhaps there are two cultural alternatives. According to one the care and control of reproduction - conception, abortion, pregnancy and parturition - lies with the female community. Men are not polluted because they are not involved. Alternatively control of reproductive care is in men's hands, and through the creation of rules and rituals which define women as passive objects vis-a-vis their reproductive fate, men are able to define and limit and curb the creativity and the

potentially polluting power of female procreation - and also incidentally, the threat of female sexuality ....These aspects of female life are then allocated a time, a place, and a mode of expression which in no way threatens the authority and order of the patriarchal medical establishment' (Oakley 1976: 57).

20. It should be emphasised that a woman's power to give birth is valued in the sense that barren women are despised by others and are in an insecure position in their conjugal homes. However the recognition of the value of the power does not make it a power which itself has high status. As pointed out in the introduction Dumont's distinction between status and power is useful in this respect.

21. Patricia Jeffery has shown how among Muslim women in Delhi a similar 'denial of physiological maternity' takes place both in notions about descent and in the organisation of birth. Here too it is because of the significance of male descent in the organisation of society (Jeffery 1979).

22. In her study of Muslim women in Delhi, Patricia Jeffery argues that women are represented as nourishing their children both when they are in utero and afterwards but this power to nourish is considered less important than the father's contribution to his children's welfare - both in the sense of his planting the see in the mother's womb and in the other things he will provide such as income and position (Jeffery 1981: 5-6).

23. One way in which this presentation is less elaborate is that the gifts are usually presented by women - in the mamera of marriage both men and women may be involved.

24. I would like to emphasise this point because it does not seem enough just to explain the taboos surrounding birth simply in terms of the liminality involved in the rite de passage of becoming a mother, one has to look at the nature of the liminality involved.

25. Interestingly Selwyn (1979: 695) describing the various low rankingcastes in the village he studied, describes one caste, the Dhimars, as 'water carriers, fishermen and cultivators of water chestnuts in local tanks' and links their relative lowness to their association with water. There were no such castes in the Malwa villages known to me but it is interesting that the bringing of water should be associated with low status.

26. A few words should be said about my use of the terms 'good sacred' and 'bad sacred'. By 'bad sacred' I mean an association with powers that are seen as harmful and dangerous. Thus spirits would fall under the category of 'bad sacred'. 'Good sacred' would include benevolent goddesses. However it should perhaps be noted that categories of 'good sacred' and 'bad sacred' need not necessarily coincide with the categories pure and impure. Pure goddesses can be malevolent and cause harm. Sita Mata the small pox goddess is one example. Wadley (1977) gives other examples. Malevolent goddesses are what I would call 'bad sacred'. Similarly in general terms a woman may be thought less pure than a man but it is only when this relative impurity manifests itself in her ability to harm and pollute the rest of the community as in the days following birth that she comes associated with bad sacred forces.

27. Patricia Jeffery in her paper on Muslim women in Delhi (1981) raises the question about why women were prepared to accept the devaluation of their reproductive role and specialise their daughters into this view and although I have not answered the question fully in this chapter I would argue that the honoured aspects of social maternity are valued enough by women to let them accept the necessary evils associated with childbirth.

CHAPTER 7

DEATH: WIDOWS, MOURNERS AND DEAD WOMEN

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to show how death affects the ritual states of women. It centres round an analysis of funeral rites, for these are the occasions in the life cycle when the effect of the world of the dead upon the world of the living is most apparent. Following Hertz (1960), Kaushik (1976) and others the basic assumption is that funeral rites are about the transition of the deceased 'from the world of the living to the world of the dead' (Kaushik 1976: 266). This transition involves the separation of the deceased from the world of the living and his/her gradual incorporation into the world of the dead (cf. Van Gennep 1960: 144pp). Not only is the dead person separated off from the world of the living but for the purposes of the transition mourners are also separated from the normal world of the living and resume a place within it only when the deceased has been fully incorporated into the world of the dead (cf. Das 1976: 256). The dead stand in a special relation to the 'moral community' and are key symbols of one of its organising principles:- patriliny. Thus the relation of women to the dead conveys something about the relation of women to the 'moral community' as a whole.

Ritual practices at death involve three different categories of women:- the deceased (if a woman), mourning women and widows. An examination of how these three categories are affected by their contact with the world of the dead seems to highlight and confirm patterns that have already emerged in the relation of women to the sacred in the examination of other life cycle rites. In addition they indicate the difference between the role played by men and women in

the creation of the 'moral community' - ie. the difference between the social sexuality of men and women.

The chapter begins with a brief synopsis of funeral rites and then goes on to the analysis. As with the chapter on marriage it is not a comprehensive analysis attempting to explain every aspect of funeral rites; rather it looks at what funerals convey about the ritual state of women. The arguments draw heavily on the discussions of other scholars for their theoretical base.

MORTUARY RITES

As mentioned in chapter 6 death is a relatively public event and if a person is known to be dying, villagers who are close friends or relations come and gather near the house of the dying man or woman. Once it becomes obvious that the individual is going to die he or she is usually taken off the bed and laid on the floor.[1] When death occurs the women of the house set up a loud but unmistakable wailing and it is this ululation that informs close neighbours that death has occurred. Word spreads round the village like wildfire. Friends or relatives may be despatched to inform members of the agnatic groups including married women who live in other villages, but there are no special messengers.

'The mourning period corresponds to the belief in a marginal state of the departed spirit intermediate between the world of the living and the world of the dead' (Dumont and Pocock 1959: 11). Thus the rites that immediately follow death separate off the deceased and mourners from their former states. First the deceased is laid on a spot on the floor that has been purified with cow dung. Then the body of the dead person is washed (either by a man or a woman depending on the sex of the deceased) and annointed with ghi. After this the deceased is dressed preferably in his/her best clothes. A married woman with a living husband will be

annointed with henna and turmeric but a widow will not be (I will discuss this point further below). Then a little food known as pad is put in the mouth of the corpse.

After this men and women who are agnatically or affinally related to the deceased or who are friends of the family come to pay their respects to the corpse by touching its feet. Men bring clothes to present to the deceased (these clothes are later given to the sweeper or to a member of the Balai caste). After leaving the visitors wash. All this usually takes place within two or three hours of death for it is customary for the body to be cremated as quickly as possible.

After the presentations of clothes and while it is still light (cremations are never carried out in the dark since this is thought to cause trouble for the pret (departed spirit)) the corpse is put on a bier and covered with a red cloth. Then a procession goes out to the funeral ground. If the family has enough money a small band may be hired to lead the procession. This is followed by a small group of male agnates of the deceased, among whom is the chief mourner who will light the cremation pyre itself. Before leaving the house for his task he too washes and shaves to purify himself. He carries a piece of smouldering cow dung with which to light the fire which has been taken from the hearth of the house where the person has died. The chief mourner is usually the son of the deceased or the son's son, or the daughter's son or the brother or brother's son, in that order of preference (cf. Mayer 1973: 235). Behind these men come a group of women who 'sweep' the ground with the corners of their saris wailing all the time. Directly behind them comes the bier which is usually carried by four agnates or other caste mates. Behind the bier follow another small group of women among whom is the chief mourner's wife who carries a black clay pot with her and clings to one corner of the bier.

The cremation ground is some way outside the village (see figure 3, chapter 2) and village women do not accompany the bier to the cremation ground.[2] Instead they leave it at the edge of the village and the wife of the chief mourner throws the empty black pot after the departing procession so that it shatters.[3] The women then return home weeping. The reasons and implications of the women remaining behind are not clear and will be discussed in more detail below.

At the cremation ground a shallow trench is dug. The wood for the pyre is placed on top of this. Traditionally this job appears to have been done by the Balai but nowadays few members of this caste are willing to do it so the caste mates of the deceased often perform the task. The corpse is laid on the pyre and the chief mourner sets light to it.[4] When the fire has died down all the men who have accompanied the bier to the funeral pyre go together to the well to wash before returning home.[5] Again the cremation itself is a rite of separation for it is thought of as releasing the dead man's atma (spirit or soul) from his body. Pandey (1949: 443) comments that classically it is 'regarded as an offering into the Sacred Fire, conducting the corpse to heaven as a sacrificial gift'.

While men are at the cremation ground the women remain behind sitting huddled together ululating, calling the name of the dead person.[6] Eventually when they judge that the cremation pyre has been lit they clean the house by sweeping it[7] and then go to the well to wash before returning home to await the return of the men.

Later at dusk all those men who went to the funeral pyre, or who came to pay their respects, earlier, wash at the well and come to the house where they gather waiting silently in a line. As night falls all say together 'Ram, Ram' before finally returning home.[8] Members of the extended agnatic family stay behind to eat a simple meal of boiled rice.

From this time until ten days after the death of a man and eleven days after death of a woman[9] members of the household and other agnates only eat simple food. This is food that is boiled and not fried and food that contains no salt, turmeric or other spices. The chief mourner and his wife sleep on the floor rather than a bed and do not wear leather shoes. They must go out of the house as little as possible and for the first three days after death they should hardly leave the house at all. Death is thought to cause pollution often referred to as sūtak. Unlike birth pollution death pollution has a relational aspect[10] and for this reason male agnates both within the household of the deceased and elsewhere let their hair grow and do not shave. Women do not wash or comb their hair. These taboos are observed by all women who have married into the gotra. Where daughters and sisters are able they generally observe such taboos as well. A woman's natal family may also observe some taboos but for a shorter period. Other practices that are carried on for the entire mourning period are the custom of ensuring that the door is left open day and night to allow the deceased person to leave. A light is kept burning all night and food is prepared and left on the spot where the deceased person died in the morning and evening. These practices rest on the half expressed feeling that the dead person is still present in the house but informants were vague as to what way the dead person was present.

Every dawn and every dusk women related to the family gather together to weep for a short period. Relatives from other villages will usually come to visit during the mourning period and when they arrive at the house they are greeted by weeping on the part of the women. This contrasts with the silence surrounding birth (see chapter 6).

In addition to her behaviour as a normal mourner a widow has to observe other taboos. No women mourners wear vermillion but the widow must take off the toe rings of one

foot and the bangles of one arm the day her husband dies and give them to be put on the funeral pyre. After this she is expected to sit in one corner of the house with her face covered and her body hunched up so that her bare wrist and foot are not exposed for her widowed state is considered inauspicious.

The third day after death the men of the household go to the funeral pyre to collect and 'cool' the ashes. These are cooled in one of several ways. They may be cooled at the cremation ground itself by allowing boiling milk to spill over on top of them; or they may be taken to the village tank, or to one of the sacred rivers. The Shipra at Ujjain or the Nerbada at Onkareshwar are usually the most popular, because of their proximity.[11] After he has done this the chief mourner ties a white turban on his head which he continues to wear for the rest of the period of mourning.[12] Women purify the house with dung on this day.

The next significant event occurs only if a woman has died and takes place nine days after death in her natal household, not her conjugal one. It is known as gaurnī and seems to mark the fact that a woman has connections to sever in her natal home as well as in her conjugal home. Generally members of a woman's natal gotra do not observe many of the mourning taboos for her unless she has been living with them. The gaurni rite consists of a lamp being lit in the dead woman's honour by her brother and her brother's wife and then gifts being made to certain defined personnel. Usually these gifts consist of clothes and if the woman was not a widow vermillion powder, bangles and henna are given to nine married women. Some families such as the Darzi make more elaborate gifts and include brass vessels but these are usually only given to married sisters and daughters of the households. Many informants specifically compared the gaurni to the nukatā and pagrī tying that, as we shall see below, mark the end of the mourning period in the woman's conjugal household.

Any food or hair taboos the household has been observing are terminated at this point and the natal house is purified by cleaning it with cow dung.

Ten days after a man's death and eleven days after a woman's the rites are performed that mark the end of the severest mourning period for the household concerned (ie. the woman's conjugal household). These rites are known as gāṇtā or kriyā karm (cf. Mayer 1973: 235). The male agnates of the family go to a nearby stream and the chief mourner performs a rite with the Brahman and all shave their hair and beards. It has become popular among many families to go to Ujjain or Onkareshwar on this day and perform the rites there. The widow sends the bangles and toe rings that were not thrown on to the funeral pyre, to be thrown into the river on this day and her brother gives her a new sari or lugara to wear. She may show her face after this point. However she will be discouraged from visiting other households until the first Holi festival after her husband's death.[13]

Among the Teli and the Gari it is also customary for other women of the household to come to the stream at this point and there, rather than crying, they sing half of one of the songs that are invitation songs normally sung at weddings. The women return home and clean the house with dung once again of that day. In the evening members of the inner kin group eat a meal of sweet rice.

Either immediately after the kriya karm or some time the next day (cf. Mayer 1973: 236) the chief mourner is divested of his white turban and has a red turban or pagri tied on his head. This may be tied by his wife's father or mother's brother or a classificatory equivalent. After this he is free to move about in the village.

A feast known as nukata is usually held either that day or the day after the kriya karma for all the caste mates; and, if the family can afford it, for the whole village. This seems to mark the reincorporation of the family of the

dead person back into normal life.[14]

The day after the nukata (ie. twelve or thirteen days after death) the first normal meal ie. spiced or fried food, is cooked in the family home. In many castes it is customary for a sister or daughter of the family to come home bringing food stuffs and to cook this meal. However certain castes for example the Nai, Lodhis, and Darzi have affines from families who have given wives to the household coming in to cook this first food. Among the Balai and the Garis the practice is changing since many families now consider it wrong to take food from a family where they have given women (ie. the conjugal families of their sisters or daughters) and are discontinuing the practice of a sister cooking food in favour of the relatives of wives of the conjugal household cooking the food.[15]

Villagers comment that as the days after death pass the impurity associated with death decreases. On the last two days of mourning and the day after the nukata the house where death has taken place is purified by cleaning it with cow dung, finally removing the impurity with which death associated it.

DEATH AND IMPURITY

Death, it will be clear from the practices described above, is associated with impurity. The taboos concerning unwashed hair and not wearing vermillion are the same as those that women must follow during their menstrual periods. The number of ritual ablutions performed after contact with the cremation pyre and at kriya karm also indicate that the event is associated with impurity. Informants themselves say that for the ten or eleven days of the most intense mourning there is sutak (pollution). Classically too death is associated with impurity (cf. Pandey 1949: 448). It is precisely this aspect of Hindu funeral rites that seemed to have preoccupied some of the earlier writers on the

the subject (eg. Dumont and Pocock 1959).

However as Kaushik comments 'To see the Hindu ritual dealing with death as primarily a way of dealing with impurities emanating from the event is reducing the whole semantic domain to one structural principle...'(1976: 286). As the material presented in the earlier chapters shows, simply seeing events in terms of purity and impurity does not always indicate much about the ritual states of women since it ignores other principles at work. Therefore it seems useful to discuss briefly the ways in which funeral rites indicate that they are something more than simply a way of dealing with the impurities emanating from death.

There are three main ways in which beliefs and practices surrounding funeral rites suggest that principles other than purity and impurity are involved. The first is the association of funeral rites with misfortune and danger (dos). The second is that although some of the taboos enjoined for the mourners seem to be linked with purity others seem more to be linked to ascetic practices (eg. sleeping on the floor eating bland food etc., cf. Das 1976: 257). The third is the similarities perceived by informants between weddings, which as we have seen are extremely pure events, and funerals. While referring readers to Das and Kaushik (1976) for a fuller analysis of the nature of forces associated with death in Hinduism it is worth considering the significance of these practices.

The way that death is associated with danger is clear from the beliefs about those who should avoid the corpse, the house of death, and the cremation ground. Children and pregnant women must avoid these places. When asked why, people never reply in terms of purity and impurity but rather say that dos ie. misfortune will befall them, the implication being that death is somehow contagious in the sense that it will bring about misfortune or death to certain categories of people who come into contact with it. The same kind of

explanations are given for keeping those who are married away from the corpse or the house of death, and even after the main mourning period is over members of households where death has occurred in the past year are not usually made welcome at life crisis rites such as god bharai or wedding preparations. Again these taboos are discussed not so much in terms of impurity but rather in terms of the idea of generalised misfortune ie. dos.

In chapter 4 it was shown in connection with menstruation, that the association of impurity with danger is not automatic in Hinduism - and it was argued that, following Dumont, where it does occur 'other principles' are at work. In the chapter on menstruation it was also argued that danger associated with the pollution of menstruation indicated something about the dangerous quality of women's sexuality. Here the danger associated with the corpse seems to stem from what one might call the death force, rather than sexuality and it indicates that principles associated with death structure the sacred, as well as principles of purity and impurity.

Many rituals undertaken at death seem to be to do with purity and ascetic practices. As we have already noted the corpse is prepared as if it were a sacrificial offering. It is cleaned with ghi, a pure substance.[16] The chief mourner is shaved before he goes to the cremation ground as well as afterwards. The corpse of a married woman is annointed with henna and vermillion substances, that she may not wear when classified as impure, ie. when she is mourning and menstruating etc. Yet paradoxically, the clothes given to the corpse are put aside to be given to sweepers from a neighbouring village. People wash after the visit to the cremation ground etc.[17] Das and Kaushik argue that these purifications and washings should be understood not only in terms categories of pure and impure substances but rather they mark different stages of separation. The corpse is

washed so as to symbolise the way it is being separated from or leaving the world of the living and the chief mourner washes because he is an important intermediary in this passage from the world of the living to the world of the dead. Similarly the washings and purificatory rituals undertaken after the visit to the cremation ground are concerned to separate the living from their close contact with the dead and bring them back into a world where they are not so closely associated with the forces of death. As we have seen in chapter 6 water can remove people from various liminal states. Das and Kaushik suggest that it is only by seeing impurity and purity as a means of articulating a relation between the world of the living and the dead that the seemingly contradictory funeral practices can be understood.

Furthermore Das suggests that the practices of eating bland food, abstaining from sex, sleeping on the floor etc. make the mourners, in some sense at least, similar to ascetics (Das 1976: 257). She explains this as follows 'The ascetic transcends the categories of the social and cosmic world. Similarly the mourner stands outside the system while he is dealing with a liminal cosmic category, that of the preta. The renouncer's liminality is permanent while the mourner returns to the social world with incorporation of the preta with the pitr' (Das 1976: 257). In effect then, many of the taboos surrounding the mourners and the corpse can be better understood as expressing something about the kind of liminality that a funeral as a rite de passage creates rather than simply dealing with the 'sutak' death creates. In the discussion of different mourning practices among women and men more consideration will be given to the nature of the liminality that death entails.

Many informants, particularly women referred to funerals as the 'big wedding' (moti sadi). Questions as to why only women went to the cremation ground drew responses like - 'Women do not go with the barat'. The comparison of the

funeral procession to the barat was again made when people compared the bands that played at weddings with the bands that played in the funeral processions. Informants said that female corpses were dressed like brides. Also people compared the singing of women at weddings with their wailing at funerals. In some castes half the verses of wedding songs are actually sung by women on the day of kriya karm.

The key to this comparison of weddings and funerals can be seen in one statement an old woman made. I asked her where her natal home was. 'It is here' she replied and would not change her mind although I knew this to be untrue. Changing tack I asked where her conjugal home was, 'Up there' she answered, - pointing to the sky. 'This is my natal home, I am waiting for my lagan to be written so that I can go to my sasural' (ie. heaven). In this instance the old woman was explicitly comparing the process of separation from one group and incorporation into another that occurs at marriage with the process which occurs at death. This seems to explain the similarities between funerals and weddings Funerals, are to borrow Bloch's phrase, about 'placing the dead' (1971), while weddings are about placing the living. Again this suggests that we are dealing with principles other than those of purity and impurity, for the structure of funeral rites is perceived as comparable with an event where dealing with pollution is not of prime importance, - ie. a wedding.

THE DECEASED

Given that it is accepted that funerals are about the separation from the world of the living and the incorporation of the deceased into the world of the dead the questions that need to be asked in this context are first what is distinctive about the passage of the dead woman from the world of the living to that of the dead, and second,

once incorporated into the world of the dead are dead women treated any differently from dead men.

The way in which a person is treated at death depends on their position in the world of the living ie. their position within the 'moral community'. Thus as chapter 3 indicated children and sannyasi are buried since they are not fully integrated into the social world and therefore do not leave it in the way that adults living in the world do. Women's funerals differ from men's to the extent that: i) the mourning period is longer for a woman than for a man;[18] ii) funeral rites are performed in two places for a woman and iii) in the preparation of the corpse a woman is prepared differently depending on whether or not she has a living spouse. This distinction is not made for a man.

As far as the preparation of the female corpse is concerned the significance attached to a woman's marital state reflects the significance attached to her marital state while she is alive. As I will show below in the discussion of widowhood the auspicious social sexuality that a woman acquires at marriage is lost when her husband dies. A man's social maturity does not depend on his incorporation into another social persona in the same way a woman's does and so it is not vital to distinguish the marital status or otherwise of the deceased.

The mourning ceremony (the gaurni) held at the natal home of the woman indicates how her dual allegiance to two households affects her passage to the world of the dead. She must leave two households and not just one. The truncated rites in her natal home indicate that her links with this household are less important than her links with her conjugal household.[19]

The implication of the longer period of mourning for a woman than for a man is unclear. Mayer refers to the mourning practices for man being longer than those for a woman and I have been unable to find classical sources which

indicate that there should be a differing mourning period for a man and a woman. Informants were, however, quite clear on this point. The reasons they gave ranged from analogies with weddings where they argue that a woman took longer to dress, to the idea that because a woman had to leave two homes at death it would automatically take her longer - the mourning period being an indication of the amount of time it would take her to leave the world of the living. Another possible interpretation is provided by classical texts which state that the mourning period should be longest for a Śūdra and least for a Brahman (Pandey 1949: 456). The implications of this are that it is more difficult for an impure being to leave the world of the living than for a pure being. Tentatively then it can be suggested that the longer transitional period between life and death that occurs in the passage of a deceased woman from the world of the living to the world of the dead does reflect how her worldly involvements differ from those of a man. Whether this is due to the impurity that female physiology creates, or to a woman's ambiguous position in the kinship system or both is not certain.

However since the world of the ancestors is one which is dominated by the principles which order the 'moral community' of the living, the length of time and impurity associated with women being incorporated into this community suggest that here again pollution is used as the symbol of the threat women pose to the ordered principles of the 'moral community'. Both men and women pollute at death suggesting that their state somehow threatens the categories which order the 'moral community' but the slightly increased pollution that women create indicates that women are more threatening than men.

Once incorporated into the world of pitr (the ancestors) women do not seem to be treated differently than men in the worship that occurs of the ancestors yearly in

Solah Sraddh. Nor, as far as I could ascertain, are they conceived of as significantly different from men. However there are exceptions to this rule - women who died in childbirth, menstruation, or who committed suicide or who were murdered become female spirits referred to as curail and pari. This corresponds with the way in which men who have died untimely deaths, for example by being murdered or by being killed in an accident, are thought of as becoming bhut ie. male spirits. The model used to describe death as the transition from the world of the dead to the world of the living can be used to explain this by arguing that orderly and correct placing of the dead only occurs when the pret (departed spirit) leaves an ordered and defined position in the world of the living - ie. when the transition is properly regulated.[20] It is significant then, given what I have already argued about menstruation and childbirth, that dying in these states means that a woman will be condemned to a permanent state of liminality. These states are opposed to the sacred forces that allow incorporation into the world of the ancestors.

WIDOWS

The beliefs associated with widows indicate the way in which a woman finds self interest in the 'moral community' through her physical union with her husband (cf. discussion in previous chapters). If she loses her husband she loses the self-interest which identifies her with the 'moral community' and so becomes a threat. As we have seen purely physical manifestations of female sexuality usually have a threatening quality but the threat of the sexuality of a married woman is to some extent counter balanced by her identification with her husband and her distinctive role in the creation of the 'moral community'. Some themes of danger and destruction associated with the sexuality of a menstruating woman reappear in the taboos and beliefs

surrounding widowhood but the lack of a husband makes the widows more dangerous than menstruating women.

The clearest indications of the way in which widowhood affects the ritual powers that a woman acquires at marriage come from the practices surrounding the jewellry and dress of a widow and the fact that she is excluded from wedding rituals performed by women with living husbands and from certain other rituals. It was described above how women throw toe rings, the signs of the married status, onto the funeral pyre and into the river. After being widowed women do not wear nose rings, or pins, glass bangles or red wood bangles and vermillion in their hair. These are part of a woman's suhag the sign of having a living husband and of the ritual powers this implies. As the fate of the woman's toe rings indicate these powers literally die with a woman's husband.[21]

Even after the mourning period is over a widow will not be invited to help in wedding festivities and if her own offspring marry, someone else will take the role of 'mother' at important rituals (see chapter 5). In domestic pujas within the house she may be allowed to be present but will never take a major role, this is particularly so in the rituals of suraj puja and god bharai connected with birth. The widow is not regarded impure in the way that a menstruating woman is for she may cook and may approach puja things and enter the temple. The restrictions on her behaviour are expressed largely in terms of the fact that her proximity will bring dos. Thus access to the female ritual domain of married woman depends on having a living husband and it is his death rather than impurity per se that excludes her from this domain. She is not marginal in the way an impure menstruating woman is but she is permanentaly dangerous.

In the chapter on marriage it was argued that a man's social puberty is not dependent on his transfer from one group to another just on the other ceremonies of marriage. By contrast a woman's social maturity is inextricably linked with her changing position between two groups. If a man is widowed he can marry again and have the full wedding rites but a woman cannot, suggesting that her social puberty and association with the auspicious powers of married women depends upon the particular circumstances of her identification with her husband which leads to the acquisition of social sexuality. She becomes part of her husband and can never extract herself from this symbolic union even at his death, and so her mature sexuality cannot be transferred and appropriated a second time. This theme is expressed in the way the corpse is dressed, and beliefs about the dead wife of a widower (see chapter 2) are echoed here.

Although a woman may not undergo the full Sankritic marriage rites again (and this reflects aspects of the written ideology that argue that a widow should not remarry), all castes within the village with the exception of the Thakurs, Brahmans and Rajput Yadav allow widow remarriage. The ritual involved is known as nathra and involves the woman bringing in water on her head to the house of her new husband and her lugara or sari being tied to his loincloth. Women who have been widowed and then remarried in nathra do in fact resume wearing the insignia of a married woman and undertake domestic puja. Interestingly however one informant suggested that a woman should not do this until she has had a son by her second marriage - ie. until by providing new male life for the new husband's household she has somehow dissociated herself from the forces of death that she became associated with at the death of her former husband.

The castes in which widow remarriage is not allowed say that a woman should only be associated with one man in her life. They point to the examples of sati: instances

where women threw themselves on their husband's funeral pyre to ensure this.[22] There is a shrine to one such sati in the village although no one could tell me anything about her. The women of the castes not allowing remarriage point to sati as an example of extreme chastity but point out that a woman with strong willpower can remain chaste after her husband's death without resorting to sati.[23] Members of castes in which widow remarriage is allowed admit that ideally a woman should 'only look one way' during her life time but that many women find this hard when even they have a living husband. Thus, if they are widowed young, remarriage rather than the sati is the most practical solution.

The argument throughout the thesis is that a woman identifies her self-interest with that of the 'moral community' because of her links with a man. Once she is free of a man her self-interest is not so clearly linked with that of the 'moral community' in which she now has low status. Different attitudes to widow remarriage reflect different ways of dealing with this problem. The castes that emphasise chastity and the model of the sati provide a woman with some kind of role that has public honour and she can be proud of. However other castes recognise that this kind of honour may not be enough to identify a woman's interest with that of 'the moral community'. The legitimation of marriages of widows has the effect of giving younger widows some interest within the established order of things and discourages them from illicit sexual activity which may damage the purity andhonour of caste and line. This is a very tangible danger that widows present. A widow producing illegitimate children is seen as the grounds for outcasting and most women said that in such a case women would be likely to seek abortions. One notorious woman in the village was believed to have done this.

However it is not simply the legitimation of a woman's sexuality that is at question when a woman loses her husband. As well as being excluded from rituals associated with fertility - that is life giving forces - she is associated at least to some extent with the power to cause death. In the same way that a barren woman is associated with the power of infertility in that some farmers think she may cause their crops to fail if they look at her, so a widow is sometimes blamed for her husband's death and may be thought to be the cause of the death of other people, particularly children. Informants are unclear as to exactly how this happens and are loathe to talk about the subject but the belief is there at a more or less articulated level. It appears to be the negative side of the power that women have to prolong the life of their husbands and children through fasting. Many of the yearly festivals performed only by women involve fasts to promote the life of husband and children and the myths that accompany these stress the life giving power woman's fasts can have. Widows and sometimes daughters-in-law of men who have died may be accused of having 'eaten' their husbands or fathers-in-law. There is a verbal contrast with the pativrat - 'the wife who fasts' ie. who does not eat and whose powers are beneficial .[24]

Here again the basis of the danger associated with the widow seems to be that she is a woman who has no interest in the established order of the community. Unlike the pativrat who demonstrates her identification by not eating and so controlling a physical desire the widow is depicted as someone who works against the order of society; - eating and giving into her appetites which work against her husband. As a living adult with no position of honour within the 'moral community' she poses a threat to the order of the community which is the antithesis of the benefits she brings as a woman with a living husband.[25] As the latter she brings life and renewal to the 'moral community' - but

as the former she promises only destruction and hence death. This is probably why she is isolated from the life giving aspects of a woman's role - from weddings and the ceremonies after birth. The position of the widow is comparable to that of the menstruating women, since as with the menstruating women the destructive aspects of female sexuality are represented as the potential cause of death and physical harm. While menstruation only associates women with these powers temporarily, a widow by virtue of having lost the individual who gives her interest within that community is represented as permanently antagonistic - unless she marries again.[26]

That a widow must conceal her arm which is bereft of the suhag ornaments, suggests, as other aspects of the concealment at birth and puberty suggest, that there are aspects of women's behaviour and emotions which are only given implicit recognition and must be concealed. The removal of suhag is a sign that a woman's links with the 'moral community' are severed, and this fact must be given as little expression as possible.

MOURNERS

The mourning period lasts as we have seen during the transitional phase when the deceased is being transformed from pret (departed) to pitr (ancestor). This is a liminal state for the deceased and also for the mourners. Their separation from practices normally associated with the world of the living seems to assist the passage of the deceased from the living to the dead. This is reflected in beliefs that if funeral taboos are ignored or not conducted properly the deceased may become a bhut. However male and female mourners act in different ways. The most striking difference is that women do not go to the cremation ground.

Few informants could offer a coherent explanation for this practice - the one most often advanced was that women do not go in a barat and it is for this reason that they do not go in funeral procession. Fuchs who asked the Balai this question argued that it was because the cremation ground with its association with spirits was particularly dangerous for women and children (Fuchs 1950: 201). Both these explanations indicate that men and women have a different relation to the forces associated with death, and so, different functions in 'placing the dead'. The first belief implies that since it is not women who go to outside groups to fetch brides, so at death it is not women who go outside the village to transact with the world of the dead. The second suggests that women, perhaps because of ambiguities in their position in the world of the living are more vulnerable to the liminal forces associated with death.

In this section I want to look at what female mourning practices do imply about female social sexuality - ie. the part women play in the creation of the 'moral community', since 'placing the dead' is an important part of the process of its creation. In addition while previous chapters have focussed on the contrast between women's social and physical sexuality, mourning practices seem to be a useful area where the differences between male and female sexuality can be highlighted. It was suggested at the end of chapter 3 that women stand in a different relation than men do to the principles of eroticism and asceticism. Women's physical make up makes some ascetic practices impossible for them and the role of the sannyasi[27] is rarely open. In chapters 3 and 4 this argument was used to indicate the complexity of the relation between physical and social sexuality. Over and above this I would argue that since women's social sexuality is an analogue of their physical sexuality - their social sexuality will be more associated with eroticism and men's will be more closely associated with asceticism. This is

to say that women are associated with meta-birth and meta-parenthood in a way men are not because even in their relation to the 'moral community' their social sexuality is more closely related to principles of eroticism than a man's is.

In classical Hinduism rebirth and moksa (release from rebirth) are central concepts in eschatology (eg. see de Barry 1958: 203-366). Unless a man can set himself apart from the worldly cycle of events through ascetic practices, he will at death be reborn into this world again. The ascetic attempts to obtain escape or release from this cycle through his practices. Beliefs about eschatology within the village are not so clear cut.

As far as a deceased person is concerned people acknowledge that on the successful conclusion of funeral rites men and women became pitr (forefathers). The dead person is worshipped on the anniversary of his/her death and again on a certain day during the period known as Solah Sraddh, the annual festival commemorating the ancestors. On the first anniversary of a death and at Solah Sraddh there are definite indications that the dead person is thought to be present in some way, in that food and drink are prepared for them. In some families during Solah Sraddh men refrain from shaving because they argue that, as in the period immediately after death, sutak occurs and to cut hair or shave might mean that hair fell into the mouths of their forefathers. If the family can undertake a pilgrimage to the Ganges three years after the death of the member of a household or later can perform certain rites there in that person's honour then they are released from worshipping that ancestor.

People did not often talk about the concepts of moksa or rebirth. They generally talked of going to 'god's home' after death. If pressed they would admit they believed in rebirth but clearly they tended not to think about it

in concrete terms. There were no clear answers as to when and how pitr were reborn. As for moksa this phrase was seldom used and when it was it was used fairly loosely.[28] Women occasionally explained that this was why they carried out certain fasts or optional devotions. Essentially it was used to convey a desirable fate after death as opposed to an unpleasant one, without the exact nature of this fate being made clear.

How then do the eschatological beliefs of the villagers relate to the central concerns of classical Hinduism (if at all)? Kaushik suggests that 'in Hindu religious thought death is seen as a transcendence of this world to a more fundamental level of existence - that of being. What is seen as order and reality is in effect a world of appearances (phenomena) which masks the ultimate reality of being. The world that the individual perceives as real is really an 'illusion' (maya) and is temporal and chaotic, in its very nature' (Kaushik 1976: 276). In his/her incorporation into the world of pitr at death the deceased becomes part of a world that is beyond the world of everyday appearances, he/she becomes like god. In addition the link between the pitr and the living members of the gotra (and ancestor worship is usually only performed by agnates) provides a sense of unchanging continuity, in the face of the social disruptions caused by death and birth. The gotra continues in the world of the living and the world of the dead and a man must have a son to ensure the continuity of his line. This continuity seems to provide a sense of permanence in the face of change. Thus while the ascetic seeks to transcend the cycle of rebirth by dissociating himself from worldly ties, for the many who do not attempt the ascetic path, it is the existence of the gotra (a category embracing the world of the living and the dead) that symbolises the 'transcendence of this world to a more fundamental level of existence'... (Kaushik op.cit).

This then may provide a clue as to the different kinds of behaviour of men and women mourners. If the continuity of the gotra and man's relation to his own pitr does in some sense express a transcendental aspect of existence then it would seem probable that men who are central to the gotra and who never change their gotra (as a woman does) would be more suitable specialists to transact with the pitr. They are more obvious representations of the way in which the gotra is immutable.[29] Thus in most castes it is men who play the leading role in ancestor worship and men who take the corpse outside the village and at cremation release the soul to become a pitr. Men's association with the transcendental issues involved in placing the dead stems not only from their relation to ascetic practices which may enable them to obtain release from the world of the living - but also on their links with the gotra which in its continuity through life and death expresses an equivalent transcendence.

Returning to the comparison between the barat and the funeral procession the similarities become more apparent. In the barat members of the wife taking group leave their village with the groom to help him through a transition which will bring new life to the gotra. Women do not accompany the men perhaps because their relationship to the gotra means that they cannot unambiguously represent the gotra which is acquiring a wife. At death men go with the corpse to help it through to a transition to the world of the dead, - the parallel would seem to be that women's dual filiation makes them less suitable agents in placing the dead.

In terms of the explanation given to Fuchs and the general feeling in Ambakhedi that the cremation ground was a particularly dangerous area for women and children the significance seems to be that women are more vulnerable to liminal forces associated with death. Vulnerability of the

women may stem from their own liminality (other times when they are vulnerable are marriage and menstruation). The implication is that there is something about women that makes them liminal with regard to death and this something is probably a combination of their dual filiation and their association with erotic forces which are more likely to impede the deceased's incorporation in the transcendental world of the ancestors.

If this interpretation is correct then female mourning behaviour should provide some indication of this in terms of the kind of behaviour it involves, as well as in terms of the kind of behaviour it does not involve ie. not going to the cremation ground. It seems to me that it does this in three ways - i) through women weeping, ii) the association of women with the house, with household objects and the inside of the village and iii) beliefs about women leaving their home at the end of mourning and sisters and affines coming to cook.

Weeping as we have seen is a highly important part of female mourning. Apart from the opportunity to express grief, it symbolises the attachment of the mourners to the deceased and in some sense their unwillingness to be parted from the deceased. It can perhaps be said to parallel the way that the tears of a bride at her wedding are supposed to express her unhappiness and unwillingness to leave her parents. It seems then to be an expression of involvement in relations in this world and as such women are appropriate markers of this involvement. Further weight is added to this interpretation by Kaushik's comment about weeping among the Hindu Doms, and the Brahmans who conduct funeral rites at Kashi. She writes that among the Doms 'loud weeping is permitted at the cremation, though after the water is offered to the preta it must cease, for the expression of grief is conceived as a bondage for the soul. Grief and passion are seen as sensory limitations of man in his temporary world which could bind the departed soul to the

world of the living. The preta must not be disturbed from his journey to the world of the pitr. The tenth day ceremony provides a final end to weeping and grief for the deceased. He is now no longer homeless but incorporated into the world of the manes' (Kaushik 1976: 286). On the death of Brahmans in Kashi she writes 'Kashi is the ultimate tirtha and is supposed to provide salvation. It is the general belief of people that weeping is unnecessary, because the deceased has transcended this world of appearances to be with the ultimate reality' (Kaushik 1976: 285). So in Kaushik's work too weeping is part of life style that contrasts with the values of asceticism and moksa. Women's weeping (men cry little and if they do so it is usually silently) thus seems to illustrate their involvement in the sphere of worldly attachment.

Kaushik also argues that spatial symbolism is important in understanding the symbolism of death ritual. She discusses several different ways in which spatial dimensions are used in funeral rituals and one of these is the way in which the opposition of inside/outside can be seen 'to corroborate the fact that the living must be separated from the dead' (Kaushik 1976: 283). To illustrate this she describes how the ideal of the Hindu is to die outside the house by the banks of the holy river, how in general Hindus prefer to die on the ground rather than in the bed, and how the corpse is always placed outside near the threshold. The latter was true of the funerals I witnessed in Ambakhedi.

At funerals it is striking how women are associated with the domestic sphere while men are associated with the more public domain of death. Men go outside the village to the cremation ground, women are left wailing inside the village boundaries. In some cases a man cracks the skull of the deceased while a woman breaks a household pot. Men cool the ashes at the cremation ground, women's task is to

purify the house. In each instance women are associated with the domestic 'inside' sphere while men go outside it to deal with the public domain of death.

That a woman mourner remains inside the house and village after death also suggests that while incorporated within a clearly defined domestic group she is safe and unthreatening - should she go outside the confines of the community (physical and moral) + her presence is more ambiguous. So at death women emphasise their incorporation within one domestic group and therefore their commitment to the 'moral community'. The prohibitions on a widow visiting seem to be a further example of this. Thus mourning taboos clearly associate women with the forces of life and the creation of life inside the household. This I would argue is in line with the more erotic sensual qualities of their social sexuality which are apparent when their part in the creation of the 'moral community' is compared with men's. The chief male mourner lights the pyre in the presence of a group of male agnates indicating the deceased's departure from the world of the living, his wife shatters a pot inside the village indicating the separation from the domestic group.

Women, and men are related to the agnatic group through women, have a significant role to play in mourning rituals, especially in rituals marking the end of mourning. It is as if a man's central position in his gotra makes him the appropriate ritual specialist at cremation and acts directly involving the deceased while women (and men related to the agnatic group through them) symbolise the continuity and renewal of one particular aspect of the gotra's existence in the world of the living: ie. the household. This might be one reason why the mother's brother ties the pagri for the chief mourner and so reintroduces him to normal life after the period of mourning is over. It may also be an underlying factor in the custom where women of the household return to their natal homes at the

end of the mourning before returning to normal duties. Widows also do this. It is as if by leaving they distance themselves from the forces of death and return with the promise of new life as they did when they were brides.

It is not clear why sisters or members of families who have given wives to the household should cook the first meal at the end of the mourning period. Again the idea of outsiders connected to the household through women seems important. Again the arrival of these figures puts an end to a period associated with death.

CONCLUSION

A woman is placed differently with regard to death than a man. Whether she is a mourner, widowed, or deceased her sex means that her ritual state differs from a man's. It seems to be the product of her different position within the 'moral community' which in turn is related to her sexuality and her position in the kinship system. To review: a widow's links with the 'moral community' are loosened by the death of her husband and for this reason she becomes inauspicious and her physical sexuality more threatening. Deceased women cause more 'sutak' than men and must have rites performed by two kingroups again indicating the way in which their relations with the 'moral community' of the living haveimplications for their relations with dead. The vulnerability of women who die in childbirth or their periods reflects the way that those who are marginal to the 'moral community' while living may retain this marginality at death. Women's mourning practices seem to be more household centred than men's. Men's association with the cremation ground and the most public rites is linked with their position in their gotra and indirectly with the values of asceticism. Women's association with the domestic group is related to themes of eroticism and the arrival of new life.

Women's departure at the end of mourning and the arrival of relatives related to them to mark the end of mourning suggests that although at times they blur the boundaries of gotras and household groups they bring the promise of renewal and life.

Ritual behaviour surrounding death involves a summation of the varying ritual states that women pass through in their life cycles. It incorporates both positive and negative aspects of their sexuality and suggests both positive and negative aspects of their position in the kinship system. The suggestion that the continuity of the gotra is equivalent at a symbolic level to the transcendence over life and death the ascetic attempts to achieve provides further support for the idea discussed in the chapter on menstruation (4) that the gotra and the patrilineal values associated with it in some way approximate to the values of asceticism. Women therefore have a different position both to the gotra and to the values of asceticism. In the rituals surrounding death the negative aspects of a woman's physical sexuality which threaten the patrilineal values of the gotra can be seen in the suspicion surrounding widows and the beliefs about those who die in childbirth or menstruation. The positive status of a woman's social sexuality - ie. the aspects of eroticism which complement asceticism and patrilineal values can be seen in a woman's association with the renewal of the domestic group at this time. Again the important symbolic themes are the low status of a woman's physical sexuality as compared to her social sexuality, the importance of her interest being identified with that of the 'moral community' and the difference in quality between her powers within the community and a man's..

NOTES

1. According to Pandey classical sources suggest that 'When the dying hour draws near, the patient is placed on a cleansed spot on sandy soil' (Pandey 1949: 430).

2. I was only able to witness one funeral during my stay and since at this funeral I wished to observe the behaviour of women mourners, I was not able to accompany the men to the cremation ground. My account as to what occurs at the cremation ground is therefore based on the accounts of male informants and may not be entirely accurate.

3. The association of the shattering of the pot with the death of a person is reflected in the colloquial insult 'May your pot break'.

4. I am not entirely clear as to the nature of the rites performed before the pyre is set alight for the reasons given in note 2. Some informants made reference to the chief mourner circuambulating the pyre but accounts were not clear on this point so I have ommitted it from the description. This appears to occur in other areas (Kaushik 1976: 272, 277). No reference was made by informants to the cracking of the skull of the deceased which appears to be a fairly widespread practice and it is thought to release the pret from the body (cf. Kaushik 1976: 272, 278) but as I did not ask directly about this it is possible that it occurs.

5. According to textual sources those who go to the cremation ground should not return home before 'sunset or the appearance of the first star' (Pandey 1949: 448). Also according textual sources it is only after cremation that the period of asaucha, pollution of defilement begins' (Pandey 1949: 448). This would explain why the chief mourner must purify himself before the cremation as well as afterwards.

   A corpse is dangerous for certain categories of people eg. Those in a household where a lagan has been written (see chapter 5), pregnant women (6) menstruating women (see chapter 4) children etc., but I was not able to

find out when villagers saw death pollution as beginning and whether they made a distinction between the dangers associated with the corpse and the pollution of death which they generally referred to as sutak. I am grateful to Simon Weightman for pointing out that generally it is after cremation that pollution is thought to begin.

6. I have been asked whether women calling the name of the dead person includes a widow or for that matter daughter-in-law actually naming the dead man. I did not ask informants about this but my recollection is that the one widow I observed did not call the name of her husband thus observing the usual prohibitions on naming. It is possible however that my memory is faulty and the question is open to doubt.

7. The timing of this cleaning would seem to indicate that it is with the cremation that the impurity associated with death begins (see above note 4 and cf. also Stevenson, S. 1920: 154). If this is so then the implication is that the corpse itself is pure (cf. Das 1976: 253).

8. This may correspond to the textual instructions for mourners not to return to the village until dusk.

9. Mayer's data appear to be the reverse of this situation; here the main purificatory rite takes place 'ten days after a woman's death, and eleven days after a man's' (Mayer 1973): 235). The classical sources make no reference to a difference in length of mourning between the sexes and few other ethnographies seem to refer to it so I am unable to ascertain just how widespread this practice is.

10. Death pollution in this respect seems different from birth pollution. Informants were unclear as to whether there was a distinction between kinds of impurity but interestingly they tended to reserve the word sutak to describe the impurity associated with death. Some people even going so far as to argue that this word can only be used to describe death pollution. This is paradoxical for as Das points out 'the term sutaka can also be used to refer to death impurity but

its association with birth impurity is stronger as becomes evident on an examination of other related terms.

Thus the verb su means procreating, begetting, bring forth; sūtri refers to female genitals and sutki to a woman recently delivered' (Das, V. 1977: 128). Das also comments that it is probably a mistake to see all kinds of pollution as identical in Hinduism and writes 'In Bengal impurity at birth is auspicious 'shuber assaucha' while impurity at death is inauspicious 'ashubber assaucha' (Das ibid.).

11. Mayer (pers. comm.) has suggested that the ashes of the dead person are not always taken to the sacred river on this day but may be kept to be taken to the sacred river at a later date. The funerals I was able to observe all involved the taking of ashes to the sacred river on the third day so I have no information about what might happen to ashes where there is a delay between the cooling on the third day and their transportation to the sacred river.

12. Mayer (1973: 235) reports that in his village the chief mourner puts on his white turban after the bath he takes when he returns from the cremation ground, however in the funerals that I was able to observe this occurred after the cooling of the ashes three days after the cremation.

13. The first Holi where there has been a death in the household is seen as an important event. When the patel processes round the village after he has lit the Holi fire he visits each house where a death has occurred and smears vermillion on the heads of all the members of that household. He is accompanied by the barber who also does this; and if possible one affinal relative of the household also does this. No explicit reasons were given for this practice but it seems related to the theme of the festival (see Appendix 2).

During the year that I spent in the village no death had occurred among the untouchable castes. When questioned villagers said that the patel would also visit the untouchable house but it is not clear whether he himself would annoint the heads of the villagers concerned or whether as in the case of the village described by Mayer (pers. comm.) he gave a handful to the member of the untouchable caste who would then annoint the household members himself .

14. Mayer records that the feast given after the pagri tying ceremony will be called a nukata only if it is the final feast. On most occasions at best a small number of guests will be fed but the final feast may be held at a later date if men wish to invite more guests than can meet at the time or financial considerations make it wiser to postpone the event (Mayer 1973: 237). I am not clear about the situation in Ambakhedi since the one feast I was able to attend at the time was held immediately after the pagri tying ceremony. Informants also told me that feasts could be held six months and twelve months after the death of a person and I attended one which was held twelve months after the death of a Rajput and involved the entire village and all the local caste mates. I am not clear whether on this occasion the feast after death had been large or small or whether my informants would have considered this memorial feast to be a nukata.

15. This corresponds with the fact that it is seen as a sign of high status to take nothing whatsoever from the kingroup to which one gives a wife.

16. Although informants never referred to the corpse specifically as either pure or impure it seems that the corpse is relatively pure. Thus Das writes 'The corpse is guarded in various ways from unclean or impure objects. Stevenson (1971) reports that great care is taken to guard the 'holy body' from the approach of unclean animals such as cats, for its merest touch would pollute the sacred corpse' (Das 1976: 253).

17. Das explains the way in which the corpse is purified before cremation and the seemingly paradoxical belief that cremation and the objects associated with the corpse are also considered polluting as follows: 'The point is that the preta is seen as trapped in the skull of the dead man. It is released only when the chief mourner breaks the skull of the half cremated body. At this stage, the ritual fire (agni) which has in his own life time carried the ritual offerings to the gods, now carries him as an offering to the god of death and the ancestors. The fact that the preta is trapped in the body - indeed the corpse is referred to as preta - explains its treatment as a sacrificial object. However the corpse is also the matter which the spirit leaves behind. This matter is impure and I

believe that when the corpse is described as impure, it is to the corpse as matter and not as preta that reference is being made. The sacrificial fire simultaneously destroys the corpse qua matter and carries the corpse qua spirit upwards to the god of death and ancestors' (Das 1976: 255-6).

18. It is not clear how widespread this difference is (see above, note 6).

19. This interpretation corresponds to ideas expressed by informants when they state that the period of mourning observed for children should only be three or four days, arguing that this is because the child has not lived very long in the world and therefore has not been so deeply involved in family relations as an adult. It is an extension of this principle to interpret the nine days observance of pollution in a woman's natal home as an indication of the way that a woman's ties to her natal home are less strong than those to her conjugal home.

20. Das 1976: 256 also notes this. I have no information on how those who die sudden or unnatural deaths should be disposed of. Interestingly Das writes 'It is significant that in the cases of sudden death, unnatural death, or in the case of sinners, when either one is not deemed fit to be a sacrificial object or where one's intention to sacrifice oneself through death is not established one is not allowed to be cremated' (Das 1976: 255). Classical sources indicate that a woman who died while menstruating should be purified by an extra washing first (Kane 1974: 233). Presumably this purificatory process made her a more suitable sacrificial victim.

21. Fuchs describes the following ritual performed among the Balahis of Nimar which also seems to illustrate this point and is especially relevant since turmeric, which as we have seen is especially associated with social puberty, is used. Fuchs writes: 'A really touching ceremony is the widow's ceremonial leave taking of her husband. Adorned with all her jewels and ornaments she approaches the bier and once more starts her lamentations. With heartrending sobs she dips her hands into haldi paste which is brought on a tray and presses her palms

with widespread fingers on the shroud which covers her husband. Such handprints are made on the chest and the loins of the corpse and at last the right hand is pressed on navel so that all five hand prints are printed on the white shroud. To understand the meaning of this one has to remember that it is a custom among the Balahis to annoint bridegroom and bride with haldi for four days before the marriage takes place. This annointment means preparing the bodies for conjugal life. The hand prints of the widow in the present ceremony mean that she now returns the haldi with which her body was annointed for the conjugal life of her husband and as he, through his annointment acquired a right over her body and she over his so she is now withdrawing her body from him and returns also her right over his body' (Fuchs 1950: 198-99).

22. Pandey notes that this custom noted in the funeral hymns of the Rgveda and the Atharvada and was prevalent mostly among Rajputs. The English legislated against it in 1835 (Pandey 1949: 442). Jacobson notes however that the custom did not finally die out at this point and there are still cases today (Jacobson 1978: 47). One old woman in the village where Jacobson worked in northern Madhya Pradesh tried to persuade those around her to let her commit sati as recently as 1977 but was dissuaded when god did not send a sign in the shape of a particular miracle (Jacobson 1978: 133). The image of sati is still a powerful one in the minds of women all over India.

23. In connection with this it is interesting that Basham writes: 'The word sati...means 'a virtuous woman', and the word was erroneously applied by early officials and missionaries to the sati's self immolation' (1971: 188). Villagers sometimes also use it in this way and the present patel's mother who died a chaste widow a year before my arrival in the village but who seems to have been much respected was often spoken of as such.

24. Leslie who has made a study of images of women in classic texts writes as follows: '...all stridharmaic qualities are included in the notion of pativrata her religious and symbolic power resides primarily in her chastity or, more accurately in her sexual fidelity to her husband' (Leslie 1980: 78). 'The epics and the Puranas abound with hyperbolic

descriptions of the awesome power of the pativrata. By this power, Sita protects her chastity from Ravana and enters the flames of the fire unharmed ...Savitri brings her husband back from the grip of death...Damayanti's curse kills a hunter intent on raping her in the forest...' (Leslie 1980: 80).

25. This theme seems to be echoed elsewhere in Indian literature. Jacobson (1978: 96) quotes Tulsi Das 'but she who is disloyal to her husband wherever she be born becomes a widow in her early youth'.

26.. Harper (1969) associates the idea that women, in particular widows, arelikely to harm others with the fact that many Havik Brahman women and in particular widows are excluded from positions of power, influence or honour. He sees the societies' fear and imputation of dangerous power to these women as a symbolic recognition of societies treatment of them and an expression of guilt about this treatment. Guilt is probably too strong a word in this instance but the general tenor of Harper's article seems to be in line with my own argument thatwhen women are excluded from any status within the 'moral community' they are represented as threatening to this community because they have no self interest in maintaining it.

27. Julie Leslie has some interesting comments on this point, she writes: 'Apart from the question of a woman's freedom of choice however, the concept of 'female ascetic' is in itself something of an anomaly. For women are conceptually assigned a place in the social and erotic world. They are so deeply centred in, even identified with both family life and sexual pleasure that the idea of woman renouncing these things becomes, for the male ascetic as for Manu, a contradiction in terms' (Leslie 1980: 49). She also adds an interesting footnote, 'From the woman's point of view it is my experience that most Indian women do not consider the ascetic life a serious option, for it is not 'womanly'. Nonetheless as Lynne Teskey's research with female ascetics in Benares today has shown there are a surprising number of women who fail to be impressed either by this supposed self contradiction or by the widespread idealisation of stridharmic values' (ibid. 95.).

28. This corresponds with an observation made by Pauline Kolenda who conducted a survey on some of the existing village ethnographies to answer how far the ideas of classical Hinduism about death had a place in the lives of villagers. She writes '...the achievement of moksa (release from rebirth is not a serious goal for most villagers. Instead they are said to be preoccupied either with attaining a better next life (Young 1931: 175-6; Dube 1955: 91) or with attaining heaven and avoiding hell (Burn 1902: 76-77; Dube 1955: 91)' (Kolenda 1964: 71-2).

29. This interpretation also tied in with Lyn Bennet's analysis of the myth of Rsi Pamcami which I quoted in chapter 4. She argued that since total asceticism was impossible for the householder by definition the values of asceticism were in part incorporated into the lives of the householder by the idea of purity of the patriline and the Rsis as ascetics and founders of the gotra acted as a kind of structural pivot. Hence her statement quoted in chapter 4 'since absolute ascetic impurity is impossible for the patriline as an institution purity of descent becomes its structural equivalent' (Bennet 1976a: 188-9).

CHAPTER 8

WOMEN AS RITUALISTS

INTRODUCTION

Previous chapters have looked at the ritual states that women pass through in different stages in their lives in terms of what these states express about women's relation to the 'moral community'. It has been suggested that some ritual states represent women as having a valued creative role within the community while others represent her as outside it and in some way threatening.

A woman's ultimate commitment to the 'moral community' seems to stem from the way in which her role within it is honoured and valued, and this denigrates the powers that she has that are not part of her role within the community.

This chapter looks at the same issue from a different perspective. Rather than looking at the ritual states of women within life crisis rites it looks at the part they have to play in ritual activity in general. If, as suggested in the introduction, all ritual behaviour has a part to play in confirming the axiomatic quality of the 'moral community' then the values about women that seem to be expressed in life crisis rites will probably be expressed in other ritual activity as well. By examining the role of women in ritual activities in general it is possible to explore their position within the 'moral community' in more detail and to contrast and compare their position within it with that of men. Thus the emphasis in this chapter will be on showing how the division of ritual labour between men and women is an expression of the different kinds of power and status they have within the 'moral community'; and on what it is about female power that seems to be expressed in this ritual activity.

Rituals performed within the village fall into three categories. Some are calendrical, occurring according to the Hindu lunar-solar calendar. Others are personal life crisis rites and still others are 'special rituals necessitated by illnesses, personal desires, astrological and meteorological conditions' (Jacobson 1970: 385).[1] The participation of women in life cycle rites has been the main subject of the thesis so the division of labour within these rituals will not be described in detail again. However in order to illustrate that principles evident in the division of labour in life cycle rites are applicable to other spheres of ritual in this chapter I shall take wedding ritual and other life cycle rites as a key; look at the ritual division of labour within them and attempt to show how some of the principles organising this division of labour apply to the calendrical rituals. I have chosen to discuss the calendrical rituals rather than the occasional rituals since I was able to obtain data on and observe these more consistently than the occasional rituals. However the arguments outlined below should be applicable to the occasional rituals and I would hope to attempt this analysis at a later date.

There are a large number of calendrical observances within the village so that in order to keep the arguments clear the chapter contains a brief discussion of the arguments and the bulk of the ethnographic material referred to is contained in Appendix 2. It should also be noted that a complete explanation and analysis of every aspect of women's participation in ritual is not feasible within the scale of this thesis. Rather I repeat that this chapter attempts to show how some of the interpretations of women's ritual states made in the context of life cycle rites can throw light on women's role in other rituals, and their part in the creation of the 'moral community'.

The three principles that seem most useful in understanding the division of ritual labour between men and women are: 1) the relation of women to the principles of 'eroticism' and 'asceticism'; 2) the way in which a woman's relation to the social persona of her husband and her relationship with her children and other individual kin affects her relation to the sacred; and 3) the different ritual roles that a woman plays in respect of her natal and conjugal kin and how this seems linked to the social construction of aspects of female sexuality.

EROTICISM AND ASCETICISM

Throughout the thesis it has been argued that women possess a kind of social sexuality that is distinct from, but related to, their physical sexuality. Hence menstruation is a polluting and threatening event associated with the physical process, while turmeric is sometimes a symbol of auspicious mature sexuality which I have called 'social' sexuality. In previous chapters it has been suggested that women have a social sexuality which is distinct from their physical sexuality and this social sexuality is the power which enables them to play a part in the creation of the 'moral community'.

Their role in the creation of this community is different to men's so the powers they have within it are different. Their part in the creation of the 'moral community' is associated with more overtly erotic values than men's is. This can be seen not only in their role in wedding and funeral rites but also in their role in other rituals.

Within rituals, activity can be divided between men and women into the following categories:

(1) Women can perform the ritual alone;

(2) Men can perform the ritual alone;

(3) Women can perform the ritual with a Brahman or other ritual specialist such as the Nai woman;
(4) Men can perform the ritual with a Brahman or other ritual specialist;
(5) Men and women can perform the ritual together in two ways: Firstly they can both be involved in worshipping a deity, as when they worship the gotra deities at weddings. Secondly, as when khvansi worship the groom at a wedding, a woman can 'do something to' a man, or vice versa.
(6) Men and women can worship together in the presence of a Brahman with the variations outlined above.

The hypothesis I wish to explore is that different rituals are concerned with different aspects of the 'moral community' and that who participates in a given ritual depends upon the aspect of the 'moral community' that the ritual is most directly concerned with. On some occasions the nature of the ritual will make men the most appropriate participants on other occasions women, and on other occasions any of the other combinations listed above. Examination of the content of rituals indicates the appropriateness of men and women for different types of ritual tasks and thus reveals something about their position in the 'moral community', and the powers associated with them.

Within the context of the wedding this idea can be illustrated with reference to the roles of men, women and Brahmans. The wedding rituals where women predominate (ie. categories 1 and 3) are those which involve women's social sexuality, or objects from places in the milieu in which this social sexuality is found - ie. the household.[2] By contrast rites involving men, and men and the bride, seem more concerned with the creation of alliances and links between kin groups (for example the greeting of the barat). Brahmans tend to be involved where rituals with forms laid down in Sanskrit texts and accompanied by chanting sacred

verses occur (cf. Sharma 1970) as in the phera or the lagan patri. The Brahman ritual domain seems defined in terms of their access to this texts, and their fulfillment of the criteria of purity associated with them.[3] Metaphorically one might say that male rituals emphasise the structural framework or skeleton of caste and kinship groupings while women's ceremonies stress women's contributions in nurturing this framework that is in putting flesh on this skeleton. Brahman rituals set these activities in the context of received written traditions.

Women's ritual domain[4] is thus defined in terms of erotic principles, and daily household life. Men go beyond the particulars of daily household life to rituals which involve their descent line. Brahmans put the wedding in the context of a progression of samskaras where the values of asceticism and the criteria of purity are seen as the final goals, putting sexuality and even the existence of the gotra in a wider context. Thus women are more closely associated with eroticism while men seem more closely associated with asceticism.

A detailed examination of the wedding rituals will bear this out, and the material can be found in chapter 5 . To review briefly here, men dominate at such rites as sagai, lagan patri, mandap garana, barat milna and god bharai. Women dominate in such rites as haldi mahurt, lagan lena, Ganesa puja, khal mitti, haldi snan karna/ukedi puja. tel cardhana and gatha bamdhana.

There are also rites where neither sex can be said to dominate. In the gotra puja performed under the mandap women prepare and cook the food to be offered but then both sexes are involved in the puja. This can be interpreted as an example of the way in which men and women combine their ritual domains. Women prepare the food:- literally something to nurture the deities of the gotra; but men also take part in the actual worship. This is appropriate since the

gotra is organised around the principle of male descent and as suggested previously (see chapter 7) to some extent represents transcendence over the impermanence of human life, which corresponds to ascetic principles associated with men. The woman's participation is also appropriate since paradoxically the gotra's existence depends upon the participation of women in household life, and their social sexuality. When men and women come together to worship the gotra deities in this way the complementarity[5] of male and female ritual domains is evident. This complementarity is also reflected in many of the calendrical rites concerned with ancestors or deities of the gotra. Such rites include those of Naumi (kvar light 9), Solah Sraddh (kvar dark 1-15)[6] etc.

Other events in which both men and woman take part include the prestations such as ban or mamera. In these prestations women as well as men present gifts and although often there are more men present than there are women, women do take part. Both mamera and ban seem to be making statements about the membership of kingroups and the relation of one kin group to another and I would suggest that the participation of both women and men in these prestations does not contradict what has already been suggested about men dominating in rituals to do with the structure of kin groups; for in the rituals which are symbolic expressions of the creation of alliances they do dominate eg. sagai, barat milna etc. It is in rituals where the existence of links is expressed where women may have a part to play. - It is perhaps also significant that on the occasions observed men tended to outnumber women suggesting that even when women do take part in formal transactions between kin groups they do not dominate.

In many calendrical rituals eg. Naumi puja women often participate and/or act as assistants to men. This reflects the importance of both male and female principles. In some of the rituals performed only by men eg. the hõma rite

at Naumi (kvar light 9) when men act as heads of household or in those castes such as the Thakurs where it is only men who worship the ancestors it seems fairly clear which male principles are being given pre-eminence and why. In other instances such as the fact that only men seem to be involved in animal sacrifice, only men worship the cholera goddess Marī Mātā and men are the most important ritualists in the rites involving 'the wakening' of the gods the reasons for the predominance of men is not clear. It may be that to explore this question fully a study on the ritual states of men and the social construction of masculinity is needed. While much of the sacred domain that women have access to can be identified with 'erotic' forces it may be that the 'ascetic' does not cover all aspects of the male ritual domain. Nevertheless the questions raised about male ritual domain do not negate the arguments put forward above but simply suggest ways in which this area might be explored further. It seems likely that answers will arise that involve more than the principles of purity and pollution.

Informants see men's rites, women's rites and the Brahman rites as being equally important. For instance as reported in chapter 5 a marriage is not seen as a true marriage without the application of turmeric. An interpretation of the ritual division of labour based on a model which involves qualitatively different powers, rather than more or less power allows us to understand why women's rites are seen as so essential and as important as the Brahman's. O'Flaherty (see chapter 3) has suggested in with respect to the mythology of Siva that both the principles of eroticism and asceticism are equally important and must be combined in Siva's personality and behaviour even although this involves a certain tension between them. The division of labour within wedding rituals reflects a combination of sacred forces needed to construct an adult person. The eroticism represented by women needs to be combined with other forces which men and/or Brahmans have access to.

That men and Brahmans are accorded higher status than women does not necessarily imply they have more power than women; it was pointed out in the introduction that power and status are not identical. The significance accorded women's rituals where women's power is seen as important, while women themselves are not necessarily accorded equal status with men is an example of this. Moreover the erotic aspect of women's power as it is expressed in these rituals - is not simply 'natural' power that needs to be tamed by men's cultural power - for as I have argued in the introduction and the chapters on marriage and birth some of the powers that women express in ritual are a distinctively social or cultural expression of their sexuality and are conceptually separate from the physical or more natural aspects.

To repeat: the closer association of women with the principles of eroticism in their involvement in rituals is apparent in life cycle rites such as weddings. Many of the powers women are concerned with are analogues of physical sexuality - for example their participation in the meta-birth of the spouse at weddings. In contrast men are more concerned with transactions between kingroups, and their powers do not seem to be analogues of physical powers in quite the same way. Thus women are represented as having two sorts of powers - one set of which are potentially disruptive to the 'moral community', while the other set are essential for its creation. Women do not seem to domesticate or tame their disruptive powers in the sense that these powers are transformed into something positive and good; rather they seem to refrain from exercising them by withdrawing from the community when they are in a situation to exercise them as at menstruation and during childbirth. In doing so they minimise the destructive effects. The exercise of powers associated with their social sexuality during weddings and on other occasions enables them to fulfill an honoured female role within the

'moral community' while still giving other aspects of their power low status.

In calendrical rituals too women are associated with the process of creation of the 'moral community' and with keeping disruptive forces such as illness and misfortune away from the functioning of life within it. They mediate between the forces of order and disorder by keeping them separate.

Many of the rituals performed by women alone are about promoting the life, health and welfare of husbands, children, and their brothers. These rituals include Sitala Satmi (cait dark 7), Dasami Mata (cait dark 10), Gangaur (cait light 3), Divasa (savan light 15), 'Savan Tij' (bhadom dark 3 sic), Hal Chath (bhadom dark/light 6), Hartali Tij (bhadom light 3), Mam Laksmi Puja (kvar dark 8), Bhai Duj (karttik light 2), Santan Satmi (bhadom light 7), Onkareshwar Athem (bhadom light 8). Men may worship gods for the general prosperity of their houshold as when Laksmi and wealth are worshipped at Dhan Teras (karttik dark 13) but it is women who worship specifically to obtain favours for the health of individual members of the household and it is the women's rituals that are most largely concerned with these events. Thus while men are primarily concerned with the relations which order the 'moral community' women are more concerned with its substance ie. the life force and events which threaten the life force.[7]

Many women's festivals seem to centre on themes in which women have the power to handle and remove certain kinds of impurity from the home. Ghar Nikalna (kvar light 14) where a year's sutak is said to be removed is a good example of this. Men, it is true are involved in purificatory rites as in those with Naumi, and the fire at Holi (cait dark 1). However most male rites connected with the household concern making objects which are ritually neutral more pure, while it is women who have the task of handling impure substances so that objects, and places may become ritually neutral. Women clear

out sutak on Ghar Nikalna. Women clean the house after death and clean and whitewash it before the major festivals of Navaratri (kvar dark 9) and Divali (karttik dark 15). Women worship the rubbish heap, the home of impurity at the wedding. If Das is right in saying that purity occurs where events are integrated in social and cosmic order (Das 1976: 248) then many women's festivals illustrate the kind of integrating function we have already observed that they perform at birth rituals.

The association of women with rituals promoting agricultural fertility may also be the result of their association with more erotic powers than men. Many calendrical rituals involve her worshipping Kheti Mata (the mother of the fields). Rather than seeing this simply as an expression of women's natural powers it is tempting to see this as an extension of her position in promoting the health and welfare of her family - ie. the ordered running of the 'moral community'. Success in agriculture is vital to the running of the community and in ritual women's role seems to be to promote the integration of these powerful forces into the life of the community. The rain making ritual described in chapter 3 suggests that to be powerful the wildness of these forces needs to be maintained but the disruptive aspect of the wildness is separated from its beneficial aspects. In that particular ritual the kumari represents auspicious undisruptive powers. On other occasions when the worship of Kheti Mata rather than Hamuman is involved married women may invoke such powers. The issue of rituals and agricultural activities is too detailed to consider at length here but a superficial consideration of the subject suggests here too that women are associated with more 'erotic' forces than men are.

WOMEN'S RELATION TO OTHERS

A major theme that has emerged from my own and other studies of village women is that women as a group do not often see themselves or act as a group with interests that are clearly different from or opposed to male interests (Sharma 1978). This was discussed in terms of the reflexivity of menstrual taboos. In some senses then to talk of women's calendrical rituals and women's rites in a wedding seems to contradict this argument. However it does not. For within a wedding a woman's role depends on whether she is mother, sister, wife, widow etc. At all times her sacred powers are defined by her relation to another person, usually a man. As Sharma (op. cit) and others (Jacobson 1970) have pointed out women have divided loyalties between their conjugal and natal homes. Thus overall they tend to see their position in terms of whether they are natally or conjugally related to a group rather than in terms of being women as opposed to men. Similarly women's ritual roles are usually defined in terms of their relation to some specific other, often a husband or child. So that although women's ritual domain is distinct from men's, within this domain, activities are usually divided by reference points which are male.

This point becomes more apparent in the way women's activities are divided as opposed to men's. Widows in weddings are excluded from many activities, widowers are not. Kumari are excluded from rubbing turmeric on themselves or others, the unmarried boy is not excluded from any male activity in the same way. Within the calendrical cycle, unmarried girls have their own special ritual in Solah Sraddh, ie. Sanja Holi. Unmarried boys do not. Married women are excluded from the worship of goddesses of their natal clan atNaumi (kvar light 9). Though related to this gotra by blood, they, by virtue of their relationship with their

husband, have become formal members of another gotra. Adult male filiation of a gotra is of a different quality and does not depend on a personal link forged at marriage. A woman has certain defined ritual duties within her conjugal household and others within her natal household. Thus at Divali (karttik dark 15) and Holi (cait dark 1) women usually referred to as 'daughter-in-law' have specific duties while at Rakhi (savan light 15) and on other occasions it is the woman as sister who is important.

I am not arguing that kinship roles never enter into the part played by men in rituals. For example at weddings the father of the spouse and the jija (sister's husband) both have special roles to play. However it is my contention that in calendrical rituals women are more frequently classified in terms of their specific position with the kinship system - ie. as either sister, daughter-in-law, mother etc.; while men play their roles as members of a group, be it household or wider descent group as a whole. Again this indicates the different position women as a group are in, compared to the position of men.

Significantly too within calendrical rituals it is only when a sister is involved that a dyadic relation becomes important in classifying a man's ritual duties. Here a man has ritual duties towards a woman who is outside his formally defined descent group yet this is a woman who is linked to him by ties of blood not marriage. His relation to his sister is not defined in terms of the group relations which characterise activities between male affines, ie. other outsiders whom he is related by marriage but in terms of a dyadic relation defined in terms of a blood tie. A woman's dyadic relations as wife, or mother or sister far more frequently come into play in a way than men's do, because they are more important in defining her position in a given kinship group than a man's are.[8] The varying definitions affect more areas of her life than do a man's.

Not only is a particular woman's ritual domain defined with reference to another individual, but many of her ritual activities identify her wellbeing and access to the sacred with the welfare of another (cf. Wadley 1976). The frequent fasts which women say are their dharma are an example of this. Karva Cauth (karttik, dark 4) is for husbands, Mam Laksmi for children, Bhai Duj (karttik, light 2) for brothers and so on. Men do not, in the general course of events, fast regularly for their relatives male or female in this way.

The concept of suhag (ie. the auspicious things associated with being married and having a living husband) often appears in women's festivals and is another way in which the idea of a woman's self interest being linked to the well being of her husband is expressed. At DasamiMata (cait dark 10) a woman fasts for her suhag - ie. for her own well being and that of her husband - the concept of suhag combines the two. The negative values associated with widows and the high status allotted to suhag can perhaps be compared to the way in which the reflexivity of menstrual taboos described at Rsi Pamcami serve to identify a woman's interests with her husband. The fate of a barren woman or a woman whose children consistently die and the numerous fasts for the lives of children again identify a woman's interest with another group: this time her children.

At other times women's interests are identified with their brothers. The formal name of the Rakhi ritual is Raksa Bamdhan (savan light 15) (literally 'the tying of protection'). Again the close identification of women's interests with another can be illustrated here. There is some confusion both in the minds of analysts and informants precisely whose protection is being sought. The tying of the thread is often associated with protecting the object or person on whom it is tied from evil spirits (see for example the tying of the thread on the wrist of the spouse at the wedding).[9] So here the sister seems to be providing ritual

protection for her brother. Families say every family should have a daughter so that she can provide Rakhi for her brother. At the end of the Rakhi ritual the brother touches the feet of his sister and gives her gifts indicating that he owes her respect, perhaps as the result of her ability to provide him with this form of ritual protection.

However women also speak of a brother being able to provide raksa (protection) for them. Tangibly it is often brothers who help if a woman's marriage becomes difficult.[10] In addition to real brothers, women classify men in their husband's conjugal village as Rakhi brothers. These are fictive brothers and women mark their special relationship with them by tying Rakhi on them at the Rakhi festival.[11] Women say that this is good because then there is one man in their husband's village who they can classify as natal kin and therefore feel more at home with, and do not have to observe the purdah restrictions required by a conjugal kin.[12] It seems there are certain parallels with a woman fasting for her suhag. In both cases a woman by ritual means tries to provide protection for a man whose welfare will affect her in a more tangible sense. It is therefore perhaps not surprising that there is some confusion over whose protection Rakhi is about.

Thus, just as socially a woman is less autonomous than a man, so ritually this is also true both in terms of life cycle rites and in terms of calendrical rituals. This lack of autonomy corresponds to other aspects of social structure where women are divided among themselves through their interest in individual men.

Patricia Jeffery's study of Muslim women in North India (Jeffery 1979) suggests that the women whom she studied who were wives of the guardians of a Muslim shrine accepted the limitations and lack of power to the extent that they did because they valued the power and status of their men folk and their subordinate status was seen as an integral

part of the men's high status. All this depends on the close identification of the self-interest of women with the self-interest of men. In Ambakhedi the way in which women's calendrical ritual activities constantly involve their relation to individual men seems to be an expression and reaffirmation of the way in which in this context too the self-interest of women is perceived as identified with the self-interest of men. The incentive for women to assert interests which might run contrary to those of the 'moral community' is not great.

In chapter 2 it was described how women's lives centre on domestic arenas of household and family group rather than the more public arenas of caste, village and political faction. Women's ritual domain with its emphasis on the erotic forces, and on individual relations within the kinship structure reflects the nature of a woman's social horizons.

WOMEN AS RITUALISTS IN THEIR NATAL AND CONJUGAL FAMILIES

In the previous section it was argued that a woman's access to sacred powers is always defined in the context of her relation with another person. What I shall suggest in this section is that a woman's role in her conjugal home and her role in her natal home differ in the kinds of female powers involved and that while a woman in her conjugal home is an ambiguous quantity a woman in her natal home is almost always regarded as auspicious.

Within wedding rituals there are three distinct female roles apart from that of the bride herself. They are the roles of mother, khvansi and sister. The role of mother can be explained with regard to the concept of social maternity and social birth that has been discussed previously (see chapter 5). The role of mother in the wedding is socially manipulable as we have seen instances when women act as substitute mothers when the real mothers are widows. What is not clear is why khvansi who are classified as natal kin, - that is as sisters and daughters-should play such a prominent

role rather than other women in the gotra or why the sister should be important. The fact that they are married and so have the auspicious powers of married women does not explain why it is regarded as important that they should be related to the household of the spouse by birth.

The khvansi's role mainly concerns the consecration of the house and household items and the social puberty of the spouse. Their domain is defined in terms of the 'erotic' aspect of women's powers. Marriage is an auspicious event and unlike other life cycle rites it is not associated with any impurity. My hypothesis is that the importance of natally related women in weddings serves to dissociate the auspicious social sexuality of married women from the polluting and threatening forces with which she is also associated. A woman is regarded as the Laksmi of her conjugal home but at the same time as suggested previously she also presents danger in terms of dissension she may cause, deaths implicit in the developmental cycle which her arrival marks and in terms of her sexual infidelity. Her powers, associated as they are with both life and death, are Janus like. A married woman in her natal home has access to the ritual domain of married women but because she does not bring the promise of new birth she is not associated with death. She is therefore auspicious representing only the beneficial aspects of a woman's sexuality. Her special relation with her brother in calendrical rituals also seems characterised by this auspiciousness.

As a kumari in her natal home a woman is excluded from worship of the dead, - she is therefore dissociated from the forces of death from the beginning of her association with her natal home (see Solah Sraddh kvar dark 1-15). The only occasion on which she is threatening or dangerous for her parents is as we have seen when first menstruation occurs in her natal home. Here the remedies are to do with concealment. The woman's condition is hidden and

denied. The girl is dangerous because this first evidence of sexuality should only occur in the context of a conjugal state that legitimates it. If it occurs in her conjugal home and the threatening aspects of female sexuality manifest themselves in a situation where the transition is legitimate then her natal family are in no danger. So even at puberty members of the natal family are dissociated from the threatening aspects of female sexuality, either by managing the timing of the life cycle rites or by ritual means which negate and deny the effects of this first menstruation. The idea that fathers and brothers should not see a girl in this state seems important here. As kumari and as married women, women do not threaten their natal households. In a way that parallels the way in which a kumari may worship Hanuman because she is female but not associated with the destructive aspects of femaleness, so a sister has a special ritual role because she is a married woman and not associated with the destructive aspects of mature female sexuality.

This auspiciousness seems to extend to the khvansi's male counterpart - her husband referred to often either as khvansa or as jija (sister's husband). It is not clear here why certain roles should be taken by khvansa and some by khvansi but many of the khvansa's roles concern consecration (eg. of the mandap) and social puberty. Unlike an affine who is a male relative of an in marrying woman, the khvansa is associated with the auspiciousness of his spouse. He, through his wife, has quasi-blood relations with the descent group. He can worship at the Mai Mata in marriage and this makes him a more suitable specialist than a male relative of an in-marrying woman. He is also perhaps in a better position to become involved in social puberty with all its associations of sexuality because unlike male members of the descent group he does not stand in father or elder brother relation to the spouse (as we have seen a mother is excluded from turmeric rites because of their specific link with sexuality).

Neither is his role threatened or changed by the marriage of his sister's sibling. The implications of the role of the khvansa are not entirely clear and do perhaps require further understanding of the male ritual domain.[13] Nevertheless they provide further evidence that a woman's connections with her natal group are auspicious.

The role of the sister as barring the door at a wedding, and as marking the door at a birth to protect the baby from evil influences and the role of a sister in welcoming the new bride at Naumi have been mentioned in chapter 5. But here again these instances bear out the idea that a married woman has a particularly auspicious role for her natal family. The above events all concern the entry of new members into a family with the undertones of death and impurity that such entries may involve. It does seem significant that a sister who is not associated with this kind of inauspiciousness should mark these events, and particularly that she should act as a kind of guardian of the boundaries. The role of sister in some castes at the end of mourning again suggests her positive associations.

In the context of calendrical rituals the benefits a sister is seen as providing for her brother at Rakhi were discussed in the above section. Similar celebrations of the brother-sister theme occur at Bhai Duj (karttik light 2) and Bhai Itvar (Bhamdon light half) and in some castes at Divasa. Here a woman performs fasts for the long life of her brother and so expresses the idea that her actions can affect his welfare beneficially.

It is interesting in this context that at Rakhi a brother touches his sister's feet and gives clothes to her. It seems almost as if he is acknowledging the benefits her relationship brings him. A husband, despite the number of rituals a woman performs for him never behaves in this way towards his wife. I would suggest that difference is that a woman is incorporated within the social persona of her

husband but she is not incorporated within the persona of her brother. She is also, through her marriage in a different gotra to that of her brother. Thus while she is linked to her husband more closely than to her brother, her relationship with her brother is characterised and maintained by more overt forms of reciprocity.

If this interpretation of a sister's role with regard to her brother and other members of her natal family is correct it gives some rise to some interesting speculations with regard to a brother's role towards his sister. If this relationship is only associated with the auspicious events of a woman's sexuality then one can suggest that for example the role of the mother's brother bringing gifts at certain key points such as the birth and marriage of her sons is related not only to relations between wife givers and wife takers but also to the auspicious aspects of the mother's sexuality that are invoked at these points.[14]

In addition there is one festival known as 'Savan Tij' but which occurs in bhadom (bhadom dark 3)[15] where married women for the first five years after marriage take ritual baths. They go deeper and deeper into the village pond each year. The final year their brother assists them and immerses them completely and gives them gifts of sweets. The festival occurs at the same season as the Rsi Pamcami festival which is to do with negating the negative aspects of sexuality and is also to do with ritual bathing.[16] Many other fasts to do with purification and fasting and the general good of suhag are performed by women at this time.[17]

Previously we have seen how a woman's purification after menses, after birth, and at Rsi Pamcami expresses her dissociation from the disruptive aspects of her sexuality and her commitment to the norms that order the 'moral community'. It is possible that the ritual baths a woman takes after she is married at 'Savan Tij' express the gradual separation of the bride from her natal family and

so the separation from any disruption her divided loyalties may cause. That her brother comes to assist her on the final occasion suggests that in helping her in this purification he associates himself with the auspicious aspects of his sister's sexuality. He gives sweets to her implying that the relationship between brother and sister is a relationship of happiness and promise rather than discord. (Sweets are usually given in the context of celebrations such as birth, weddings, at Holi etc.). The precise nature of women's festivals in bhadon needs to be examined more closely for this point to be proved conclusively but the general tenor of the rituals at this time suggest that this interpretation of 'Savan Tij' is correct.

To prove conclusively that women in their natal homes have more auspicious powers than women in their conjugal homes and to test the idea put forward about the brother sister relationship and the powers associated with it I would probably need to conduct a wider survey of literature on village religion and also to talk more closely to informants themselves about this issue. But as an analytical model it does seem useful in understanding the different kinds of roles women play in their natal and conjugal homes.

CONCLUSION

The arguments outlined above have been an attempt to draw together and make more explicit some of the themes implicit in previous chapters, particularly the chapter on marriage where the function of woman as ritualist was left largely unexplored. The aim has been to show that the themes emerging from the particular analytical approach to life cycle rites that this thesis has adopted uncovers themes that are relevant not only to life cycle rituals but also to the rituals of the village as a whole. This serves to provide additional support for the analysis attempted. It

throws some new lights on the religious festivals and uncovers some other possible areas of exploration in the field of village religion.

If, as argued in the introduction, the 'moral community' is the ideological aspect of the community and the axiomatic quality of this community then the way in which women's participation in these rituals reaffirms other themes which have emerged in life cycle rites shows how the calendrical cycle of festivals and other religious activities are also part of an expression of the social construction of women's roles and their place in the 'moral community'.

NOTES

1. These three categories have been chosen because analytically it is a convenient way of grouping the material. They do not have any theoretical significance. On other occasions for it may be more useful to divide the rituals into the categories priestly and non priestly. (see for example Sharma, U. 1970: 20).

2. This compares with the way that Fruzetti suggests that the concerns of the songsar (household) characterise women's wedding rituals in Bengal (Fruzetti 1975: 340).

3. The exact nature of the ritual domain of the Brahman deserves a fuller treatment than space here allows. While other ritual specialists have their functions defined in terms other than purity and impurity, it does seem that one of the salient characteristics of the Brahman ritual domain is its purity. Thus Das writes 'The extreme purity of the officiating priest, while he is in contact with the sacred, separates him from ordinary profane individuals' (Das 1976: 260).

4. I have borrowed the term 'domain' from Lina Fruzetti. She writes 'activities of women in Bengal form a social domain separable and understandable in its own terms...this domain is not defined by morphology alone (ie. separate sex role activities) but also by the cultural expressive dimension of social action, the set of meanings through symbols and categories which define and interpret a woman's society in relation to society at large...Women's domain is rendered visible, systematic and coherent and is controlled as well as exposed by the rituals which can be performed by women alone' (Fruzetti 1975: 335). Thus when I refer to the 'ritual domain' of women I am looking at the kind of access to the sacred the rituals women perform reveal and what this conveys about the indigenous associations of femaleness.

5. Fruzetti also notes the 'complementarity' of male and female ritual domains. She writes: 'Yet in India the relation between male and female may not be contrary, contradictory or oppositional: it may be a complementary relationship which extends from the separate woman's domain to other levels of society as well' (Fruzetti 1975: 56). Here she suggests that this complementarity may extend even further than the complementarity of ritual domains to relations between the sexes as a whole.

6. The brackets associated with the name of each festival refer to the date of the Hindu month on which it occurs. Thus Ghar Nikalna is written Ghar Nikalna (kvar light 14) because it occurs on the fourteenth day of the light half of the month of kvar. Details of the calendar and Hindu months are given in Appendix 2.

7. If women as ritualists are largely responsible for ensuring that life processes, eg. health, sex etc. are auspicious while men's rituals reflect other concerns it is interesting to speculate how far this association of femaleness with life processes is reflected in the context of the wider Hindu cosmology. As Wadley points out 'sakti - the manifesting power (Wadley 1977: 118), the creative principle' is female. Elsewhere she writes that prakrti (which Wadley translates as nature or undifferentiated matter) is 'the active female counterpart of the Cosmic person Purusa' (ibid. 115).

8. Wadley writes of a woman's natal and conjugal household 'Essentially, a woman belongs to neither household in the same manner that men belong' (Wadley 1976: 156).

9. Underhill has the following comment about the protective nature of the Rakhi thread, '...the custom of binding a silk thread, with tinsel ornament onto the wrist of another to preserve him from evil. Mothers frequently bind them on their children's arms, wives on their husbands, sisters on their brothers.

   The legend is that, while men and gods were still under Bali's tyranny, before Vishnu took the Vaman incarnation, Indrani wife of Indra, procured such a thread from Vishnu, and tied it round Indra's wrist, whereby he became protected from Bali' (Underhill 1921: 134).

10. Thus Wadley writes 'This desire to have a brother is due mostly to the realities of woman's life in her two homes. It is brothers who can give a sister happiness by providing them with protection from afar' (Wadley 1976: 157). Thus she interprets Rakhi as follows 'In raksha bandan, the sister directly asks the brother for his protection by tying the rakhi (protection) on his wrist' (ibid. 158).

11. In addition to making a Rakhi brother by tying a Rakhi thread on a man's wrist a woman may make the tie even more binding by 'hearing Ram's name with him and a group of others' (see Mayer 1973: 139).

12. For a more detailed discussion of the whole sphere of ritual kinship see Mayer 1973: 139ff and note he writes 'A major significance of this ritual tie is the way in which it gives support to a woman in her conjugal village' (Mayer 1973: 140).

13. I am not arguing that the only possible interpretation of the role of a khvansa in a wedding is the one put forward here. Selwyn (1979: 689) has suggested that the role of the sister's husband should be looked at in terms of honour being transferred between wife givers and wife takers. It is possible that at a different level this is one of the messages that the role of the sister's husband conveys. However as I have mentioned elsewhere (see chapter 2) this is not easy to determine since the hierarchy between wife givers and wife takers is not as pronounced here as in other regions of India. Nevertheless it may be that in the context of relations between wife givers and wife takers Selwyn's interpretation is partially correct, it does not in fact conflict with my own suggestions about the ritual domain of khvansa and khvansi.

14. Again as in note 13 it seems to me that the kind of interpretation I am putting forward here need not necessarily conflict or contradict more tranditional analyses in terms of the relations between wife givers and wife takers. To look at it in terms of the quality of a woman's relations (in an ideal sense at least) with her natal family as well as the structural implications of this relationship makes our understanding of what is involved in these transactions fuller.

15. See note to Appendix 2 for a discussion of why 'Savan Tij' occurs in bhadom.

16. Mayer makes the following comments 'Again, at the festival of Gangaur in the month of Bhadon (August, September), women who have taken a vow to do so are ritually ducked in a stream by their real or ritual brothers. Since this takes place in their village of marriage, where they have their ritual kin, these are more prominent than their real kin. After the ceremony the ritual brother and his ritual sister's husband give each other a turban, a common sign of friendship between affines' (Mayer 1973: 139-40). I was not able to observe the final ceremony of this series of fasts during fieldwork but if the observations made by Mayer refer to the same series of events and it seems likely that they do then the interpretation given of this festival being about emphasising the positive aspects of affinity would seem to apply here as well.

17. Crooke writes 'According to the rural belief, Vishnu sleeps for four months of the year, from the eleventh of the bright half of the month Asarh, the Deo soni Ekadashi, 'the reposing of the god,' till the eleventh of the bright half of the month Karttik, the Deothan, or 'god's awakening'. So the demon Kumbha Karana in the Ramayana when he is gorged sleeps for six months. According to Mr. Campbell, during these four months while the god sleeps demons are abroad, and hence there are an unusual number of protective festivals in this period....During the four months of the god's rest it is considered unlucky to marry, repair or thatch a hut, or make house cots' (Crooke 1896: 300). -

Many of the rituals that occur during these four months in Ambakhedi as will be shown in Appendix 2 are concerned with negating negative aspects of female power. Since as the discussions on menstruation and fertility have shown such negatively valued states are often associated with demons Mr. Campbell's observations seem significant.

CHAPTER 9

CONCLUSION.

This thesis has examined the varying ritual states of Hindu women from the perspective of one of the central concerns of 'what has come to be called feminist anthropology' - namely 'the relation between women's reproductive physiology, the cultural constructs which define a society's ideas of womanhood and the social roles of women' (La Fontaine 1981: 333).[1] Underlying this approach has been the assumption that ritual symbolism encapsulates values and categories that are axiomatic in society. The different kinds of ritual state of Hindu women seem to reflect a construction of womanhood where a woman is associated with different kinds of power at different stages and situations in her life. In turn these powers are related to the cultural constructs surrounding women's reproductive physiology.

Throughout the thesis the female powers expressed in ritual are referred to as physical and social sexuality. The term sexuality is used because the symbolism suggests that both aspects of female power are directly although differently related to a woman's reproductive physiology. In the case of physical sexuality the powers concerned are those related to the social construction of actual physical processes. In the case of social sexuality the powers concern not the social construction of physical processes as such, but analogues of these processes which play a part in the legitimation of authority and creation of social roles in the community. The most obvious of these processes is the meta-birth that an individual undergoes at marriage. It will be clear from this that I have used sexuality to embrace more than aspects of behaviour relating to copulation. The Oxford Dictionary defines sexuality as a noun deriving from 'sexual' which means 'of sex, a sex or the sexes'. The use of 'sexuality' in this

thesis has centred round the meaning of this word as it relates to the physiological processes that identify individuals as as one 'sex' or another rather than the sex act itself.

The model of social and physical sexuality has been developed in order to understand the alterations in women's ritual states between purity and impurity and between high status and low status. Other writers have noted these alterations, for example Hershman (1977) and Wadley (1977). Hershman sees the difference as being between women's role as a sexually active being, whose sexuality is negatively valued and seen as threatening, and as a mother whose fertility is positively valued but can only be realized through sexual activity.[2] The model which I have developed suggests that physical motherhood is devalued while social aspects of motherhood are not. Thus the contrast is not so much between the status of a woman when she is sexually active and the status of a woman when she is not; but between which aspects of her sexuality she is expressing.

Wadley suggests that the malevolence and benevolence associated with different female figures in Hindu mythology depend on whether a woman is associated with nature or culture, and whether she controls her own powers herself, or whether her powers are controlled by men. However since Wadley is not dealing with real women her analysis does not focus on the question of the social construction of reproductive physiology. Thus the issue of how and in what way female physiology does associate a woman with natural rather than cultural powers is left open. In addition use of the nature culture paradigm can obscure the fact that because 'nature' and 'culture' are themselves cultural constructs use of them in analysis can impose ethnocentric ideas about the relation between nature and culture. The adoption of the concepts physical and social sexuality makes it easier to explore the relation between aspects of female powers without prejudging the relation between these aspects.

Social sexuality is not just physical sexuality which has been tamed or controlled but is an expression of the powers women have, that are valued by the community as a whole and that are different from their physical sexuality.

THE MORAL COMMUNITY

The concept of the 'moral community' has been taken from Bloch and Guggenheim's discussion of Gudeman's use of the phrase (Bloch and Guggenheim 1981). In this thesis when women's powers are referred to as placing them outside the 'moral community' what is meant is that they become alienated from relations which create a community of people with defined duties and obligations towards one another and where the principles of authority and status are clearly established. Bloch and Guggenheim argue every community has to express symbolically the principles which legitimate authority and underly the relations of the 'moral community'. They suggest that 'Vilification of biological reproduction is thus the first step in the legitimation of an alternative community based on other principles of reproduction: holier, cleaner and controlled by legitimate authority' (ibid. 381). However they point out that the 'vilification of biological reproduction' is 'not a simple contrast between dirty women and clean men. The first part of the opposition, the association of women with biological birth and dirt is indeed identical in all cases but the other side is more varied - not men so much as legitimate society which is ordered by men but consists of both men and women' (ibid. 384). The evidence in this thesis suggests the ideological aspect of Indian village communities is in part constructed round an opposition between two aspects of female sexuality. Women's physical sexuality is vilified but its analogue, her social sexuality, gives her a crucial role in the 'moral community'. Bloch and Guggenheim conclude that 'On the common humiliation of mothers are built the varied and many symbolic constructions

of power' (ibid. 385); to which one might add that in this case the symbolic construction of power rests upon the humiliation of one aspect of motherhood contrasting with the status of another aspect. Thus a woman's sexuality does not totally alienate her from the 'moral community'. Social sexuality as distinct from physical sexuality defines her as a 'moral' being with an interest in the survival of the community in its current form with its existing principles of authority.[3]

PURITY AND IMPURITY

The purity and impurity of women then is interpreted as more than expression of high and low status. In addition it expresses certain kinds of marginal positions that women's biological functions associate them with. A woman who is impure is associated with powers that threaten to undermine the system of authority on which the 'moral community' is constructed. She is marginal because although belonging to society she becomes associated with powers that are disruptive to society and key social categories. In contrast the extremely pure woman is marginal but her marginality is represented as a creative transcendence of these categories in the sense that the powers with which she is associated in this marginal state are in harmony with the principles which legitimate authority. The bride and female ritualist in a wedding do not threaten the way in which male principles are involved in the creation of male patrilineal groupings and the control of economic resources. The woman giving birth or menstruating demonstrates that she has powers which are female and not related to male concerns or principles of organisations, consequently she is perceived as threatening. Yet women's powers which associate her with high status are metaphors of her low status physical sexuality, and hence a woman's sexuality both alienates her from and incorporates her into the 'moral community'.

Physical and social sexuality are forms of power in their own right. In addition they seem to act as 'sensory poles' for the symbolic allocation of status to different forms of female behaviour. Where female behaviour is seen as threatening there may be mythological and other associations with some low status aspect of women's sexuality. Thus the mythology surrounding menstrual taboos links the threat that women pose to men with these menstrual taboos. Interestingly it seems that it is not just in terms of their sexual infidelity that these women are threatening but also their dual filiation to kin groups. Female roles that are not threatening are linked to higher status aspects of ritual activity. The dominant role of khvansi ie. sisters who endow bride and groom with their social sexuality in weddings suggest that the role of sister is not threatening to men if these sisters are married and past puberty. Their sexual infidelity is unlikely to harm them directly and their link with other kingroups can be beneficial.

As mentioned in chapter 1 Fruzetti suggests that analysis of women's participation in wedding rituals indicated that in India women's relations with men might be 'complementary' not contradictory or, in opposition to one another (Fruzetti 1975: 56). The problem with this argument has been to relate it to the symbolism of female pollution which suggests that women are threatening in some way. The use of ideas such as physical and social sexuality and their relation to the concept of the 'moral community' indicates that it is difficult to discuss the female roles as wholly in opposition to male roles and interests. Instead aspects of women's roles seem to conflict with the interest of men and aspects seem to be complementary.

It may be that relations between men and women appear complementary because of the way in which threatening female behaviour is symbolised. It is possible that the particular symbolism of purity and pollution mutes

contradictions and elaborates complementarity.[4] Pollution is an 'amoral' quality (Douglas 1966). It is 'amoral' in the sense that there need be no intention to pollute on the part of the polluting agent for an act to cause pollution. Thus by attributing the dangers women create to an 'amoral' force the possibility is denied that the fundamental cause of any threat women pose to men is a conflict of interests between women and men. The symbolism of ritual states thus serves to represent women's part in the 'moral community' as valuable and her role as a disruptive influence as an unintentional state to be avoided where possible.

ISSUES LEFT OPEN

It was suggested in the introduction that ritual has a connative aspect in that by expressing certain values it reinforces them as so influences behaviour. Although this has been an assumption underlying the thesis and the way in which the values expressed in ritual seem to correspond with the more general values of society has been demonstrated, the complexity of interpreting the symbolism has precluded discussing the relation of ritual to the social structure in which it is observed in any great detail. It is beyond the scope of this study to show how 'mutually affecting spheres of reality' (Ardener, S. 1982: 15) actually do affect one another. This is an area which needs more work especially in understanding how ritual states and meanings they have, change in the face of social change. Also it deserves further enquiry in under standing how the ritual states of women in this part of India compare and contrast with the ritual states and associated meanings in other parts of India where the kinship systems operate differently - and other non Hindu influences are more pronounced.

This issue of comparison with this study to the situation of women in other regions in India also raises the question of what this study of women in one village in

Central India conveys about women elsewhere in India and about Hindu women abroad. It has been argued throughout that the values associated with female sexuality are related to the values which structure the 'moral community'. How the 'moral community' is structured will of course vary in the varying socioeconomic, religious and power structures that Hindu communities are in, therefore in the strictest sense the study is only representative of the situation of similar communities in Malwa. Hershman's work for example suggests that in the Punjab virginity is far more subject to ritual and symbolic elaboration than it appears to be in Malwa (Hershman 1977). Given that virginity as a symbol contrasts women who have been in contact with men, with women who have not, this suggests that the relation between the sexes assumes a significance as a source of symbolic danger that it does not appear to have in Malwa. How this is related to systems of honour, social stratification and islamic values in the Punjab one can only speculate.

However although this particular difference shows that regional differences can be important, the study does raise wider issues about the concepts relating to birth in Hinduism and the general values expressed about female sexuality. The data from Nepal provided by Lynn Bennet (1976a) on menstrual taboos suggests that some aspects of this analysis do have wider implications than the regional limitation imposed by the geographical setting of this study and further enquiry in different regions in India might be useful in this respect and indeed provide a better understanding of the relation between ritual values and social structure.

POWER AND STATUS

Finally it should be said that there are certain ideas concerning power that run throughout the thesis and these ideas owe a debt both to 'feminist anthropology' and

to the study of caste and hierarchy in India. In brief the essence of these ideas is that power can be qualitatively different and that status is not only related to the amount of power any one person possesses but to the nature of the power possessed. From the point of view of the social anthropology of women Weiner has written:

> Given that women control some kinds of cultural resources defined as their own it follows that they maintain some degree of power that differs from male power. Therefore if we begin to understand social and cultural power in its own right rather than focus on power in its political phase we not only learn about women we also learn about men.
>
> (Weiner 1976: 12)

Weiner's book on Trobriand women suggests that in order to understand the position of women within a given society rather than identifying women as powerless we need to look at precisely what kinds of power they are associated with. An examination of the ritual behaviour of Hindu women suggests that female power is closely concerned with reproductive physiology but the actual biological processes are devalued. Women however have another set of powers which are related to these processes but are subtley different from them, ie. their social sexuality. These powers then relate directly to a woman's sense of herself and reproductive physiology without giving status to the physical aspect of her existence as such. These powers are complementary to men's and play an important part in the creation and maintenance of the 'moral community'. Thus the concordance of women with sentiments of 'the moral community' and with male control seems to depend on a very subtle form of alienation from the value of their own reproductive processes. What is significant when women's power is examined is not so much the degradation of women's biological functions but the

way these processes have analogues which are honoured. This in turn reveals much about male power and the structure of the 'moral community'.

Dumont's work on caste suggests that the status of group depends on the status of the power with which it is associated and it seems that his ideas can be applied to women as presented in ritual in two ways. Firstly it has direct implications for the low status of women's physical sexuality compared with their social sexuality. Secondly when women's role is compared with the male role in the creation of the 'moral community' women are represented as having a different kind of power than men. Crudely women's power seems associated with eroticism and men's power with asceticism. Both elements are essential in the creation of the 'moral community' and both have high status. However because ultimately asceticism is associated with purity which is the 'encompassing' principle of the ordering of the hierarchical values in Hindu society, in the last resort men, and in particular male Brahmans, have higher status than women.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

It is hoped that this thesis presents a contribution to the study of Hinduism in its village setting and to an understanding of the place of women in this setting. The focus on the relation between ritual states and the social construction of women's reproductive physiology should also mean that the situation of these Indian women can be compared and contrasted with those in other cultures for although a woman's reproductive physiology does not determine her social role the social construction of physiology is an important factor in how women are perceived in different societies. The concepts of physical and social sexuality and the 'moral community' form an analytical model which attempts to explore the meaning and significance of ritual states. It may be that future research will necessitate change or alteration in this model in the same way that I have changed,

discarded and altered explanatory frameworks developed by others. The model constructed then is to be regarded as an analytical tool rather than a replica of reality and as such it can be set aside or modified if eventually superceded by a more useful framework for the phenomena under discussion. At the time of writing it seems to illuminate an area of social reality which is often 'left in the dark'.[5]

Notes

1. In a footnote to these remarks Fontaine comments 'some would deny that there is a feminist anthropology with any theoretical or conceptual iuntity' (La Fontaine 1981: 347). However it seems to me that the issue of the social construction of womanhood and of a women's reproductive powers has become a central issue for those concerned with understanding the position of women in different cultures . The elaboration of and development of the nature:culture debate for example owes much to the way in which different studies of women have shown how these 'natural' facts are culturally constructed (eg. Rosaldo and Lamphere (eds.) 1974; MacCormack and Strathern (eds.) 1980; and Ardener, S. (ed.) 1977 et. al.). Whether or not this should be called feminist anthropology is perhaps open to debate but there remains a common interest in this area which in many cases initially arose in part from more strictly feminist concerns.

2. Hershman's arguments are complex and elegant, this particular crystallization of his discussion is borrowed from Sharma's description of his ideas since her description seemed particularly concise (Sharma 1980: 135-6).

3. The status given to the creative aspect of women's social sexuality is I believe a factor in the conceptual framework which makes it difficult to challenge their position in society as a whole and in particular the negative status given to other aspects of their sexuality. To do so would be to deny themselves status and honour since paradoxically the honoured aspect of being a woman rests upon its contrast with the negative aspect. This is perhaps an example of the process which the Ardeners refer to as 'muting'. Shirley Ardener writes 'This dominant model may impede the free expression of alternative models of their world which subdominant groups may possess, and perhaps even inhibit the very generation of such models' (Ardener, S. 1977: xii) (my underlining).

4. This idea owes its origins both to the work of Shirley Ardener and others on the muting of female models (Ardener 1977, op. cit.) and to Dumont's work on ideology and hierarchy. Dumont writes 'Certain aspects of social reality are consciously elaborated while others are left in the dark' (Dumont 1961: 42).

5. This sentence borrows phrases from a remark of Dumont's (see note 4 above) and seemed a suitable note to conclude on since the social sexuality described in the thesis does seem to represent an area of social reality that has not been elaborated in previous analyses perhaps because Westerners tend to see sexuality as only having a physical or natural aspect and ignore the social and cultural facets it may have in other cultures.

APPENDIX 1

SONGS SUNG AFTER BIRTH

These are examples of the more popular songs sung by women to mark the birth of a new baby. They are known as jacca songs - literally 'new mother songs'. About ten days after the birth of a baby, women in the woman's natal and/or conjugal household may invite other women round for a singing session. The songs are sung unaccompanied or to the beat of a small parchment drum played by one of the women. No men are present. During the evening jaggery and/or sweets are distributed.

THE RICKSHAW SONG

This song is a fairly recent one as references to the rickshaw and the nurses (who are hospital nurses) suggests. It is set to a popular film tune rather than a traditional chant. However it illustrates the old theme of a woman's desire to be in her maika when she gives birth. Jacca means new mother.

Chorus

'Oh ricksaw please stop,
My jacca is coming on foot'.

Verses

1. 'My jacca does not like the midwife,
Nurses are coming for the delivery'.

Chorus

2. 'My jacca does not like her mother-in-law,
Her mother is coming'.

Chorus

3. 'My jacca does not like her jethani (Huselbrowi),
Her bhābi (BroWi is coming)'.

Chorus

4. 'My jacca does not like her nanand (HusSi),
   Her sisters are coming'.

   Chorus

5. 'My jacca does not like her devar (HusYoBro),
   Her brother is coming'.

   Chorus

6. 'My jacca does not like the drum,
   Bands are coming'.

   Chorus

WALK SLOWLY

Another song with the chorus of 'please walk slowly' echoes the rickshaw song showing that the rickshaw song is a development of a much older theme. A few verses indicate the general flavour of the song.

Chorus

'Please walk slowly my friends
The child in my lap should not cry'.

Verses

1. 'My mother-in-law was called, she did not come,
   Please young devar fetch my mother.

   Chorus

2. 'My jethani was called, she did not come,
   Please young devar fetch my bhabi'.

   Chorus etc.

Jacobson (1975) describes birth songs but interestingly hers do not focus on the contrast between a woman's maika and her sasural, although they do indicate the isolation of the mother. This may be because in Jacobson's region women do not give birth in their natal homes.

Reference

Jacobson, D. (1975) 'Songs of Social Distance: Women's Music in Central India.' Journal of South Asian Literature 11 (1 and 2): 45-49.

THE CHILD IS CRYING

While the above song expresses the mother's preference for her natal family, other songs describe the activities that occur at birth. In these songs the various women involved are described as being paid a fee. This does not happen except where a midwife is called in (see chapter 6). One song has a verse that goes:

'The midwife came and cut the placenta, she will take a fee,
Nurses came and cut the placenta, they will not take a fee'.

The idea that members of a woman's conjugal family take a fee for their services may be a way of expressing the isolation a woman feels in her conjugal family.

The terms carna and sattia in the song below have been described in chapter 6. The gun referred to in the song refers to a gun sometimes fired to mark ceremonies after birth. I only saw this done once when a katha was held in a woman's conjugal household the day after the mul ceremony had been performed.

Chorus

'The mother's child is weeping, pick up the child for a while, oh my husband,
My child is crying'.

Verses

1. 'The midwife comes and cuts the placenta, she demands her fee,
Please give her the fee, oh husband,
My child is crying'.

Chorus

2. 'The mother-in-law comes and prepares the carna she demands her fee,
Please give her the fee, oh husband,
My child is crying'.

Chorus

3. 'The jethani comes and makes sweets, she demands her fee,
Please give her the fee, oh husband,
My child is crying'.

Chorus

4. 'The devrani comes and prepares the cot, she demands her fee,
Please give her the fee, oh husband,
My child is crying'.

Chorus

5. 'The nanand comes and makes the sattia, she demands her fee,
Please give her the fee, oh husband,
My child is crying'.

Chorus

6. 'The devar comes and fires the gun, he demands his fee,
Please give him the fee,
My child is weeping'.

Chorus

APPENDIX 2

CALENDRICAL RITUALS

The dates on which festivals are observed are reckoned in terms of the Hindu calendar. The months of the Hindu year are lunar months. Only Makar Saṁkrāṁti is held on a date reckoned in terms of the solar calendar. It marks the winter solstice and may be in māgh or pūs (cf. Mathur 1964: 179). Below I give the names for the Sanskrit months, and corresponding gregorian months. The months are divided into two halves, a light half on the fifteen or so days approaching full moon (pūrṇam) and a dark half on the fifteen or so days approaching the new moon (amāvas). In this region the pūrṇimanta system is followed and the months begin with the dark half, the next month beginning the day after pūrnam (see Underhill 1921: 22). The names of the days of each half of the month are variants of Hindi numbers so tij means day three, dūj day two etc., dassarā or daśamī mean day ten etc. The year begins on the first day of the light fortnight of cait, but is not marked by any particular observance.

LIST OF HINDI MONTHS AND THEIR GREGORIAN EQUIVALENTS

Hindi Name (with diacritics)	Gregorian Equivalent
Cait	March-April
Baisākh	April-May
Jeth	May-June
Asāṛh	June-July
Sāvan	July-August
Bhādoṁ	August-September
Kvār	September-October
Kārttik	October-November

Ag'han	November-December
Pūs	December-January
Māgh	January-February
Phāgun	February-March

The cycle of festivals seems to correspond to certain patterns in the agricultural year. Most of the calendrical festivals occur in the months of cait, bhadom, kvar and karttik (ie. between April and November). It is mainly work like marriages and funerary feasts which take place in the period when farming is not so intense (cf. Mayer 1973: 23 and Mathur 1964: 169). Not all castes perform every festival and in the description below I will indicate which festivals are widely observed by the entire village population and which are observed by only some castes. In addition it should be noted that not every household in a caste may observe a festival. The observance of minor festivals depends upon the customs and piety of the family concerned.[1] Below I give a summary of all festivals occurring in the year followed by a brief description of each of them.

LIST OF FESTIVALS OCCURRING IN AMBAKHEDI

Hindu Month	Half	Day	Name of Festival (with diacritics)
Cait	Light	3	Gangaur
			Rām Naumī
Baisakh	Dark	9	Akha Tīj
Jeth			No major festival
Asarh	Light	11	Dev Sōnī G yāras
		Full Moon	Asarh Purṇam
Savan	Dark	1	Bāg Rasoī
		New Moon	Divāsā
	Light	5	Nag Pāṁcamī
		The Sunday preceeding Rakhi (see below)	Bhāī Itvār
		Full Moon	Rakhi

Bhadom	Dark	1	Bhūjārya
		3	Sāvan Tīj (sic)
		4	Ganeśā Cauth
		6	Hal Chath
		8	Janm Astmī
	Light	3	Hartālī Tīj
		4	Ganeśa Cauth
		5	Rsi Pamcamī
		6	Hal Chath
		7	Santān Satmī
		8	Onkareshwar Athem
		10	Teja Daśamī
		11	Dhol Gyāras
		14	Anant Caudas
Kvar	Dark	1-15	Solah Sraddh
		1-15	Sanja Holī
		8	Mām Lakṣmī
	Light	1-9	Navaratrī
		9	Naumī
		10	Dassarā
		14	Ghar Nikalnā
		Full Moon	Keliā Pūrnam
Karttik	Dark	1-Full Moon	Kārttik Puja
		4	Karvā Cauth
		13	Dhan Teras
		14	Divālī
	Light	1	Gordhan
		2	Bhāī Dūj
		11	Dev Uthne Gyāras
Ag'han			No major festival
Pus			No major festival
Magh	Light	1	Makar Samkrāmti
Phagun	Dark	14	Śivrātri
	Light	Full Moon	Holi
Cait	Dark	1	Holi
		5	Ramg Pamcamī
		7	Śītalā Sātmī
		10	Daśamī Mātā

DESCRIPTION OF FESTIVALS

Cait

Light Half

3 Gangaur (cf. Jacobson 1970: 390).[2] on the tenth day of the dark half of cait women in the household who are to do this festival plant some sorghum seeds in a pot, near the figure of Gangaur. The figure is dressed like a married woman with all the symbols of suhag. On the day of Gangaur the daughters of law of the household worship her and then if there is no smallpox or chicken pox in the village, women go in procession with the figure to cool the sorghum shoots in the well. They distribute jaggery, water nuts and henna to their friends.

This festival is performed by married women and although people do not give an explicit reason for worshipping Gangaur its association with the symbols of suhag suggests it has to do with the welfare of their husbands. Evidence from elsewhere indicates that this Gangaur figure is an embodiment of Pārvatī-Śiva's consort (see Underhill 1921: 50; Jacobson op. cit. and Wadley 1976: 157). This adds support to this interpretation since Parvati and Siva are often represented as the perfect conjugal couple (cf. Wadley 1977).

This ritual is observed by women in the Darzi, Brahman, Thakur, Barber, Lohar, Gari and Teli castes. Not all the women in each caste observe it - only those who have made a special vow to do so. Gangaur seems to be an unambivalent symbol of the auspicious aspects of female power. It may therefore be significant

that her worship does not take place when the more ambivalent figure of Sītalā Mātā is thought to be in the village. The auspicious and inauspicious aspects of female power are kept separate.

9 Ram Naumi: pious men and women fast on this day and make offerings to Rām by taking them to the Ram temple although villagers say that this is a 'big' festival observance of it was not marked by much activity during my stay. It is not associated with either men or women in particular and seems rather to be seen as paying annual respects to an important god. Observance seems to depend on individual piety rather than caste. The Brahman may perform an elaborate puja in the temple.

Baisakh

Dark Half — No special festival

Light Half — Akha Tij: (cf. Mayer 1972: 22); this marks the beginning of the agricultural year. Women and any other member of the family interested worships a pot full of water by performing arti to it. In some families five pieces of mud are put under the water pot and given names of the months in which rain may occur. The ones to become damp by water seeping from the mud pot are thought to represent the months in which rain will occur. The festival is observed by all castes except the Brahmans, the Balai and the Camars who go to beg food on this day.

This festival is predominantly associated with women and seems linked to women's special association with the fertility of the fields (see chapter 3), rain and water in general.

Jeth — No major festival

Asarh

Dark Half — No special festival

Light Half — Dev Soni Gyaras: on this day the gods go 'to sleep' and no weddings may be performed until they 'wake up' in karttik (October and November). Men do arti inside the house near a place where the household pujas are usually performed. Nai, Khunbis and Thakurs observe this festival. Villagers are not clear precisely which gods are asleep. The reasons for both the god's awakening and the god's sleeping rituals being performed by men are unclear.

purnam (15) — Asarh Purnam: families worship Bheru, they should worship at the shrine of their local descent group but families where the shrine is far away worship him in the home. Men and women do the puja. The festival is observed by all except the Brahman, Bhils, Jatav and Koli.- This festival linked as it is to the descent group follows the pattern of many of the gotra pujas with both men and women participating.

Savan

Dark Half

1 — Bag Rasoi: this festival is performed on the first Tuesday after the rains have begun. In 1979 this was on July 10th which happened to be the first day of savan. No work is done on this day and all food is cooked in the fields since there is a prohibition on cooking it in the village itself. Ideally all the gods in the village should be worshipped by men on this day. In practice the patel leads a party of men to worship at the shrine of Mari Mata (the cholera

goddess) and men in each family worship the kul devtas and any other shrine particularly associated with their family. Otherwise the day is an opportunity for a general picnic and rejoicing and older informants said the previously men and women had erected swings and swung on trees at the edge of the village.

This festival is observed by all the village and the participation of the patel suggests that it is to do with the prosperity and fertility of the village as a whole. I am not clear why it is only men who worship Mari Mata - one possibility is that this goddess is often associated with meat sacrifice but I have no direct information on this. Animal sacrifice does seem more closely associated with men than with women. The significance of men worshipping the kul devtas ties in with what has been suggested in chapter 8 about the importance of men in worshipping lineage deities.

amavas (15) Divasa: women of the family make a design on the wall with lime or cow dung. (In the Teli caste the men make the design). Women then put a light in front of the image to worship it. Men may also worship the figure as well. The design made is usually the image of a woman or several women but in some castes it is of a man. No one could give me any explanation for this image. Most castes in the village take part in this festival. Given that many of the festivals performed at this time of year are to do with the fertility of the fields and/or the life and health of individual family members it seems likely that this festival has something to do with this as well. The importance of women

within it also suggests this but exactly what the major themes of the festival are, are unclear. One informant told us that Divasa was a festival that women performed for their brothers. But I was unable to find anyone who could corroborate this.

Light Half

5 Nag Pamcami: images of snakes are drawn on the wall and then people perform arti in front of them. People may also leave milk outside for snakes to drink, for on this day the snake is considered a god. In most castes it is women who draw the figures and perform the puja but people say that men may do so if they wish. The festival is observed by all castes.

This festival appears to be common in North and Central India (cf. Underhill 1921: 123) and Crooke (1896: 137ff). No explanation was offered apart from the general protection of the family from snake bite. Crooke (1896: 129) suggests that snakes are associated with fertility and rain which again seems to follow from the festivals observed in this season. The prominence of women in this festival reflects their association with agricultural fertility and rain. Jatav and Teli plant seeds for the Bhujarya festival on this day.

Sunday before Rakhi Bhai Itvar: on this day women fast for the welfare and well-being of their brothers. See Chapter 8 for comments. On this day members of the Lohar household plant wheat seedlings which they use in the worship of Gangaur on Bhadom Tij.

purnam (15) Rakhi: known more formally as Raksa Bandhan: this is one of the biggest festivals in the year (the other two most important are Holi and Divali). It is marked by a festive air and the mood of the people is very relaxed. Large numbers of daughters and sisters usually manage to return home for this festival which adds to relaxed holiday mood. The festival comprises of three basic elements.

(1) Sravan Kumar: married women draw a figure known as Sravan on the wall and worship it by doing arti in front of the figure. It is not clear what the significance of worshipping him on this day is. Sravan is known as a man who was devoted to his parents who were blind. He was killed by accident while taking them on a pilgrimage. The element of filial devotion embodied in his story seems interesting given the other connotations of the Rakhi festival.

(2) The growing wheat shoots planted at Nag Pamcami and cooled on Bhujariya (see below) are worshipped by the women of the household (cf. Jacobson 1970: 390 and Crooke 1896: 293). Only the Telis and the Jatav appear to observe this aspect of the festival.

(3) Thread Tying: this has three elements. The tying of thread to the roof of the household which is known as gharsari. The tying of thread to real brothers and the tying of thread to fictive kin.

(i) Gharsari: in the morning the head of the houshold does arti to the ridge pole of the house and then ties a Rakhi thread to it. This seems to be for the protection of the house (cf. Mayer 1973: 17). In some households threads are also tied to the cows and

to other cattle.

(ii) Throughout the day sisters come to visit their brothers bringing with them gifts of clothes and sweets. They present these things to their brothers and then tie the Rakhi thread on their wrists. When the sisters return home after their visit they are given gifts of clothes by their brothers.

(iii) From this day until JanmAstmi (see below) women also make the same kind of presentation to men who are known as their Rakhi brothers. These men usually come from a woman's conjugal village. Once a thread has been tied, women in theory at least, have the same duties towards their Rakhi brothers as they have towards their real brothers.

The implications of this festival have largely been discussed above in chapter 8.

Bhadom

Dark Half

1 Bhujariya: this appears to be a much bigger occasion in other parts of Central India (see Jacobson and Crooke op. cit.). Girls of the Jatav and Teli castes who planted the seedlings on Nag Pamcami take these to the village tank. They throw half in the water to cool them; - and distribute the rest to friends and neighbours who give them grain and money in

return. It seems to be a festival marking friendship among friends and neighbours and is part of the larger theme of the rainy season's festivals associated with fertility and auspiciousness in general.

3 Savan Tij (sic): this is the way that villagers refer to the fast and ritual ducking in the pond that married women perform on this day, despite the fact that it occurs in bhadom.[3] For five years after their marriage women fast on these days and then immerse themselves in water. On the fifth year their brother assists them and then gives them sweets. They immerse themselves deeper and deeper in the water each year starting with their feet in the first year and going upwards towards total immersion on the fifth. They may only start this puja after they have worshipped at Naumi in their conjugal home for the first time.

As suggested in chapter 8 it seems to be associated with removing some of the negative aspects of mature sexuality and affinity, hence the importance of the brother in the final ceremony.

This day is also associated with the worship of Gangaur (cf. Mayer 1973: 139) in certain castes. The Lohar household keep an image of Gangaur which is also sometimes worshipped on cait 3 (see above). On this day they dress it with all the trappings of a married woman, then a group of women from this house go with it to the well. There they dip the corners of their lugaras in water and put it to the mouth of the image saying their husband's name as they do. (This causes much

mirth and hilarity since generally the husband's name is a taboo word). Then they return to the house. The following day the wheat seedlings are cooled.

This festival too seems associated with a womans suhag. The shoots link this festival with fertility. This aspect of the rites performed on bhadom Tij is comparable to the festival of Gangaur in cait and indicates the similar features of women's ritual domain.

4 Ganesa Cauth: on this day women from the Darzi caste worship Ganesa for the good of their suhag.

6 Hal Chath: (Plough Sixth): two festivals of this name are observed in the village, one on the sixth day of the dark half of bhadom and the other on the sixth day of the light half of bhadom. The latter is the more important in terms of the number of households that observe it. The festival is observed by Lodhis, Darzi, Telis, Thakurs and Brahmans. The Lodhis and Telis worship a plough, refrain from work and fast. This is done by women not men. The women of the other castes who observe this festival also fast and refrain from work but do not worship the plough. The Thakurs explained this in terms of a story they associate with this day in which a woman's child is killed by his paternal grandparents so they can prevent a drought. The woman fasts and returns her son to life. The Darzis say it is a fast usually done by unmarried girls so that they may be blessed with a good husband.

Thus the observances on this day present rather a confused picture, but once again the following themes occur: 1) suhag, 2) female fertility 3) the fertility of the fields, in this case epitomized by the plough worship, and 4) the power a woman's fasts have for another person, - here a child. All seem to conform to the patterns outlined in chapter 8.

8 Janm Astmi (birth eighth): this is a festival celebrated all over India and marks the birth of Krsna (cf. Underhill 1921: 144). In Ambakhedi the Brahman performs a special puja in the Amba Mātā temple and those who wish (both men and women) may attend. Many mark this day by keeping a fast. This is a festival like Ram Naumi where neither sex predominates and the Brahman is the ritualist in chief because his ritual domain is defined as the temple, and here considerations of purity and impurity are paramount.

Light Half

3 Hartali Tij (cf. also Underhill 1921: 108): this is a festival in which married women fast and worship Parvati and Siva. The Brahman woman makes images of Parvati and Siva from clay and worships them in her own home. Other women who observe the fast gather together dressed in their finest clothes in the Amba Mātā temple in the evening and present various offerings to figures of Ganesa, Siva and Parvati. The Brahman then reads a story that tells of how Parvati obtained Siva as a husband because she fasted on this day. The story ends with the Brahman reading out how

women will fare badly in the next life if they do not fast on this day.

Most castes except for the Jatav, Camar Khunbi and the Koli say that they perform this fast. However when I observed the puja in 1979 only the Nai, Gari, Khunbi, Lodhi, Lohar, Rajput Yadavs, Darzi, Teli and Thakur women were present. This fast like many others performed in bhadom focuses on the auspiciousness that results when a woman controls her appetites both for food and sex. Once again Parvati is represented as the perfect model of controlled female sexuality.[4]

4 Ganesa Cauth:[5] men and women who wish to, worship a figure of Ganesa in their own homes - which they will do daily from this day until Anant Caudas when they take the figure to the pond and cool it.

This is another example of a festival at which neither men nor women dominate. It seems to have no particular link making it especially appropriate for either a man or a woman to act as ritualist. There are big processions in Indore on this day in honour of Ganesa and many villagers take the opportunity to go and see them. Some informants told me that this is why the Ganesa pujas that take place in the village are on a small and unelaborate scale and this seems a plausible explanation.

5 Rsi Pamcami: this is another purificatory festival only for women and has been described in some detail in chapter 4. All castes except the Camars and the Bhilalas take part.

6 Hal Cath (plough sixth):[6] this is also sometimes referred to as Mauri Cath (wedding crown sixth) since some women choose this day to go and cool the headdress worn at weddings. On this day women fast and do a puja to the plough. In theory men should not plough on this day. The puja to the plough is done in one of two ways:- either women may mark a tilak of rice and vermillion on the plough themselves and this seems the method favoured by the Garis and Rajputs; or they may perform a puja in the temple in front of Ganesa and an image of a plough which the Brahman draws in turmeric on a leaf.

The festival is associated with the power that mothers have to prolong the life of their sons by fasting. One informant also suggested that it might prolong the life of a brother. The stories that the Brahman in the temple reads concern the power that women have over the life of their children. It is observed by most castes except for the Bhils, the Lodhi, the Rajput Yadavs and the Darzis.

Again women are associated with the power to prolong life and also the fertility of the fields as it is embodied in the shape of the plough. Here too there is an example of an instance where a puja performed in the home need not be performed by women but one performed in the temple needs a Brahman

because this is his ritual domain.

In addition it seems worth noting that although women here are involved with worship of the plough, ploughing is an agricultural task which women rarely undertake so that women's worship of it is not based on a simple correspondence of the division of labour between men and women. It may be that the plough with its power to break up soil so that it can be sown is an example of a process which involves mediating or 'socialising' certain forces in order to reap their benefits. In this case then it would be appropriate object for women to worship and this interpretation would also be applicable to the rituals at Dasami (cait dark 10) Sitala Mata (cait dark 7) when women worship Kheti Mata (field mother) by ploughing small pieces of earth with their fingers.

7 Santan Satmi (children's seventh): this festival is also associated with the life of children as the name suggests. Women fast and worship figures of Siva and Parvati that they make from mud. This may either be done in the home or sometimes it is done in the temple with the assistance of the Brahman who then reads the stories associated with this fast. The stories concern the miraculous powers that women fasting on this day have in respect of their children. The fast is only observed by members of a few castes viz. Telis, Thakurs, Khunbis, Jatav and Kolis.

8 Onkareshwar Athem (Onkareshwar's Eighth): this seems to be a fast connected with a figure of a particular devi at Onkareshwar although villagers are somewhat vague as to the identity of this devi. It is performed by married women for eight successive years after they marry. The first year that they do this fast women must give a coconut to the village Brahman, their sister's son, their own brother, their husband's older and younger brothers and the man who cares for the cattle. In subsequent years they simply give a coconut to their brother. In the final year invitations are sent to members of the local descent group and to members of the girl's natal family. The woman's in-laws prepare bangles, toe rings and threads in a basket and then the woman gives them to her husband's sister. Her natal family present the woman with clothes and those who have completed the fast may wear a small ring known as 'Onkareshwar' in their ear.

Each year those who do the fast may also take part in a small puja conducted by the Brahman in the temple. Here they worship two figures of Siva and Parvati that the Brahman has fashioned out of mud together with two small models of cows. A feature of this ritual is that the Brahman presents the girls with threads. The women tie knots in these; if they are doing their fast for the first time they tie one knot, if for the second time two knots and so on, up to eight. When they have done this they put the strings on the puja table. The Brahman then reads

a story in which the two cows see two girls doing the Onkareshwar fast and when the cows are born again as women one of them does the fast and has children and good fortune and the other does not. The second one tries to kill the first one's children but the strength the woman has gained from the fasts protects her children from the power of the other woman.

This festival is too complicated to go into depth here but it can be seen that it involves (i) the power of women over the life process; (ii) the association of a woman's ritual state with the welfare of her children and (iii) her position with regard to different kin once she has married.

In the latter case an interpretation something on the lines on the one previously made about 'Savan Tij' rites can be attempted. Briefly the argument is as follows:

(1) The story associated with the fast shows how a woman who does the fast gains benevolent powers, one who does not is destructive and barren.

(2) The gifts made to the different relatives can then be interpreted in light of the fact that a woman is fasting to gain the positively evaluated powers associated with womanhood while removing the negative or threatening associations.

(3) Her brother thus receives a coconut yearly because he is a male figure to whom she is not threatening and who at times eg. 'Savan Tij' assists her in the control of the threatening aspects of her womanhood.

(4) At the end of the fast her natal family send her many of the insignia of suhag which she then gives to her husband's sister a woman who is usually auspicious for the natal family. The gift from wife to husband's sister suggests that at this point the wife's powers are seen only as being beneficial and auspicious.

(5) The gifts of suhag for the husband's sisters and clothes for the woman herself suggest the positive aspects of a woman's relation with her natal family. Here the family are giving to their daughter rather than taking from her and so their relation with their daughter's conjugal family and the daughter's relation with her conjugal family is, in context of this fast and the gifts that accompany, it defined as auspicious and beneficial.

The festival may be observed by women from all castes in the village except for the Bhils, Brahman, Camar and Jatav. However in 1979 the Gari women were the most numerous caste who attended the puja in the temple.

Teja Dasami: this is a festival in honour of a local deity known as Tejaji who is always depicted as a warrior on a white horse. At the roadside halt on the Bombay-Agra road about two miles from the village a fair is held. The fair centres round the temple of Tejaji[7] which exists here.

In Ambakhedi men and women who have made vows to do so process round the village behind men who carry tall poles decorated with umbrellas and/or peacocks. Then, accompanied by young men who dance skillfully whirling sticks they process to the temple at

the roadside halt. Here a man associated with the Tejaji shrine is believed to become possessed with the spirit of Tejaji. He is believed to have the power to grant favours to all who worship him and is worshipped by both men and women. The festival seems to have no particular relevance for the interpretations made about the division of ritual labour between men and women.

11 Dhol Gyaras (Drum Eleventh): this occurs eleven days after Janm Astmi (Krsna's birth) and is said to be the day on which Krsna's mother did Jal Mata puja marking the end of her impurity after giving birth to Krsna.

This is celebrated in different parts of the village in different ways. In the morning drummers who drum for family ceremonies in the different castes go round to each caste household collecting flour and grain from them. In the late afternoon in the temple in the Jatav neighbourhood, women go and make presentations of grain and incense sticks to a figure of Krsna and his mother that has been set up in the temple. Then the image is taken out on a bullock cart on which are also seated a woman who is dressed to represent Sīta and a man who is dressed to represent Rām. The bullock cart moves to the edge of the village and Jatav men perform energetic stick dances in front of it. Finally the whole procession moves off to the village tank where the image is sprinkled with water to cool it and after this point it is taken back and the festivities end.

The upper and middle castes hold a separate form of worship. A similar image of Krsna and his mother is prepared by the Brahman and then is taken round the upper and middle caste neighbourhood. Women come out and put grain and a coconut into a fold of cloth carried in front of the crib (this presentation is known as god bharai and is said to represent gifts given into the lap of Krsna's mother) and annoint the images with rice and vermillion. The Brahman who accompanies the procession distributes prasad which he has already offered to Krsna in the puja in the temple. The Balai do not seem to celebrate this festival.

Women putting gifts into the 'lap' of the images on this day suggests that a major motif of the festival is social maternity. For as mentioned above they believe to mark the end of the impurity that Krsna's mother incurred after his birth.

From the point of view of arguments previously put forward about birth (eg. chapters 1, 5, 6) it is interesting that Krsna's mother's maternity is celebrated in this way, not on the day of Janm Astmiitself - ie. the day on which Krsna's physical birth took place but rather when in the human life cycles social maternity is celebrated. Although Krsna's birth is celebrated on Janm Astmi is his mother's maternity seems to come to the fore in Dhol Gyaras.

14 Anant Caudas: those men or women who have vowed to do so, perform a special fast on this day and continue to do so until they

perform an elaborate ritual which releases them from their obligation.[8]

Kvar
Dark Half
1
to
amavas

Solah Sraddh: solah means sixteen and the shraddh referred to are the rites of propitiation for the ancestors. These rites commemorate both the recently dead and the other unnamed ancestors. Some castes perform them daily (eg. Brahmans, Thakurs, and some Rajput households); whileothers only perform them on the day of the death of the man in the descent group who died most recently. If he died on the fifth day of any light or dark half of a month they would worship on the fifth day of Solah Sraddh(cf. Mayer 1973: 238).

In most castes the rite consists of the adult members of the household offering jaggery and ghi and performing arti in a particular spot in the house. If someone has died within the last three years they may also put our food for the deceased. The Camar and the Nai put out food for the crows who are believed to represent the spirits of the deceased. Among the Thakurs, Telis and Darzi only men do the puja but among other castes women may do it as well. All castes have a restriction on married daughters and unmarried girls performing the puja.

There is also a feeling, as in the putting out of food for crows, that the dead are present at this time. Some older villagers will not shave or wash their hair until after amavas because they feel at this time the same kind of sutak occurs as when someone dies within

the house. Members of the Gari and Nai castes draw footprints in white flour facing towards the inside of the house for the first fifteen days and on amavas they draw footprints going the other way indicating that the ancestors are leaving.

For our purposes sraddh seems significant because:

(i) Married daughters and unmarried daughters are excluded from its worship. This indicates firstly that women do not have the same kind of connection with the ancestors of their natal group as they have with their conjugal group.

(ii) Since this festival seems so closely associated with death as well as the dead it is interesting that women who for their natal group seem particularly auspicious and unconnected with death and other threatening female forces are excluded from the worship of their natal dead.

(iii) The worship of the ancestors (sometimes referred to as pitr) by men only, in certain castes seems, linked to what has been previously suggested about men being closer to this kind of worship because descent is organised along male lines.

(iv) In addition the same kind of interpretation that was advanced for explaining why men go to the cremation ground and women do not can be used here. If worship of the ancestors involves contact with the dead then worship of the ancestors transcends the categories of living and dead and such transcendence is linked

to the values of asceticism. Men seem to be closer to the values of asceticism than do women and hence in some castes at least their greater importance in rites concerned with the ancestors.

Sanja Holi: at the same time unmarried girls perform the worship of Sanja Holi outside the house while their parents and brothers worship ancestors inside the house. The significance of this has been discussed in chapters 3 and 8.

8 Mam Laksmi: this feast is only observed by women of the Teli caste. Women say they fast and then worship Laksmi for the health of their children. Like many of the fasts performed in bhadom women gather together to do a puja in the evening under the supervision of the Brahman. In this instance they worship a figure of Laksmi sitting on an elephant that the Brahman has made from wheat flour and offer it food - ie. roti, and small pieces of cloth and jewellry made of wheat flour. Afterwards they take all the things to the tank to be cooled.

As with many of the other calendrical fasts performed by women this fast seems concerned with the symbols of suhag and how they and the life of children can be encouraged by a woman's fasting.

Light Half

1 to 9 Navaratri (Nine Nights); villagers describe this period as being concerned with the worship of the Devi (the goddess) or the Mata (the mother). Traditionally it is associated with the worship of Durgā and

other goddesses and worship takes place in two different ways:

(1) Domestic Puja. Symbols of the goddess, usually a triśūla (trident) drawn in vermillion on the wall and a water pot, are worshipped by adult members of the household. Each gotra has a traditional day or days on which the goddess should be worshipped and many gotras simply refer to the goddess as Astmi Mātā (eighth day goddess), Pāṁcamī Mātā (fifth day goddess) etc. depending on which day they worship. This puja is closely associated with the gotra and no outsiders including unmarried daughters are allowed in to see the puja. Consequently I was unable to witness one but was told that both men and women make offerings, men go in first and are followed by women.

Here again the status of unmarried daughters is significant. Their gotra membership excludes them from this kind of worship. In contrast it is considered essential that married women should be in their conjugal homes at this time even if the consummation ritual has not been performed.[9]

(2) Spirit Possession. During these nine nights the goddess is also worshipped in another way. She possesses a Balai medium. Each night he is possessed by goddesses said to be five sisters of Durga. They are Kalkā Mātā, Mari Mata the cholera goddess, Gūṁgā Mātā (the deaf and dumb goddess) Śītalā Mātā and Bijansan Mātā. Assisted by fellow members of his caste he is worshipped and then the various villagers who have gathered to watch

the procedure go forward to ask the goddess various questions and sometimes to ask her to remove the influence of evil eye, or a dakin etc. Women only make up a quarter to a third of those who assemble to watch the possession. This seems largely determined by practical considerations. Firstly most women are in their conjugal homes and the veiling restrictions they have to observe in the presence of the older men there makes it difficult for them. Secondly many of the men present drink and women coming from other neighbourhoods are nervous about coming and going to the sessions. Thirdly many of the women have small children to look after or chores to do. Many woman say they would like to go, but their attendance is prevented by other constraints.

9 Naumi: the ninth day is the culmination of Navaratri and it has three different elements to it. The first concerns domestic worship since most men and women worship their gotra mata on this day in the same way that they have done before. Secondly there is the fire rite conducted by the patel at the Hanuman shrine. The patel is important here because as Mayer suggests 'he thereby represents the village to the spiritual as well as the temporal world outside it' (Mayer 1973: 103). Male members of the family attend the puja and may pass various objects of the house through the fire in order to purify them (cf. Mayer 1973: 101). A goat is also sacrificed near the Camundā shrine in this spot. Mayer reports that the patel should worship at all the village shrines in succession on this day

but this did not occur on either of the two Naumis I observed.

Here the importance of men seems to be that they represent the public collectivities more closely associated with animal sacrifice than do women. Again the reasons for this seem connected with principles which structure the male ritual domain and which are not entirely clear. At Holi (see below) both men and women have a part to play in representing their households and the village at the worship of the Holi fire but in this instance it is only men and it is not evident why.

Thirdly this purification and fire rite are largely overshadowed by the third aspect of the Naumi celebrations which involve the worship of the goddesses as they possess the Balai medium. This begins in the Balai neighbourhood where 'the Devi' is given alcohol mixed with the blood cut from the ear of a young male goat to drink and then processes through all the areas of the village accompanied by drummers and a crowd of men and boys. Women come out to have their children blessed by the goddess and some households draw cauks (sacred patterns) outside their front doors and men and women of the household come forward to worship the goddess. As the procession moves on the goddess dances. Usually the most dramatic display of dancing occurs in the space in front of the three main temples where the goddess's dancing escalates to a frenzied pitch. The procession takes some five or six hours to move its way round the village and

concludes with the goddess being accompanied by a crowd of men, many of whom have been drinking, going to the tank where 'she' is cooled by being sprinkled with water.

It is interesting here that this female goddess who processes round the village carries a broom with which she continually makes sweeping movements. This perhaps reflects that she is associated with the kind of sweeping purifying function that women are so often associated with (see Dasami Mata below). They remove impurity while men take things to be purified.

In addition it may be significant that the medium, although possessed by a female deity, is a man. In general the kind of possession in which a person is possessed by a benevolent deity who has the power to cast out possessing spirits such as bhut, curail and dakin occurs most often in men. Women seem more likely to be possessed by troublesome spirits who then have to be cast out.[10] This may reflect a more general situation in which women have little authority in the public arena.[11]

10 Dassara This day is said to commemorate Ram's victory over Rāvana in which he was assisted by Durga (see Underhill 1921: 55). In some castes the eg. the Lodhi, the Nai and the Koli families worship their kul devi on this day but this time they put the objects to be used in her worship near the door as if intimating her departure for this marks the end of pujas connected with the goddess.

Among other castes the kuldevi is not worshipped on this day but young wives may return to their natal homes and in some castes, eg. The Teli, the Gari, and the Balai, the leaves of a certain tree (Mimosa suma) which are referred to as gold are given by the son-in-law to his wife's parents. The parents will give their son-in-law some small coins in return. Given the auspicious associations of a married woman in her natal home it is interesting that her husband presents her parents with this symbolic gold.

At the village level the victory of Ram over Ravana is celebrated by an effigy of Ravana being burnt in much the same way that Guy Fawkes is burnt in Britain. It is the patel who sprinkles the fire with vermillion and a little rice and then sets light to it. As at Naumi it seems to be his role as leader of the village that is being dramatised. Women are not seen as public leaders in the same way.

14 Ghar Nikalna (emptying the home): From Dassara to this time women do not throw away household rubbish but collect it and keep it in a pot. On the evening of this day rubbish is put in the pot and worshipped. Women then go together to the well singing and playing rowdy games. At the well they tip the rubbish into it. They say that doing this removes all the sutak (a term used to apply to birth and death impurity) of the year and it is necessary to procure the life and well being of the family.

This seems to be a good example of the way that women have a power to handle and control the negative destructive elements involved in household life.

purnam (15) Kelia purnam: this involves a fast on the part of all the members of the families of households who take part. Jal Mata, the water goddess is then worshipped, represented by a pot filled with water. Early in the morning the women take the pot to the well and empty it. There is some evidence that this festival is more closely associated with women than with men, in that the Balai, the Nai, the Lohars, the Garis, the Rajput Yadavs, and the Brahmans say that it is women who do the worship while in the other castes both men and women are involved in the puja.

Women themselves link this festival to Ghar Nikalna which as has been shown is about the removal of impurity. This suggests that at Kelia purnam, the purifying power of water is celebrated. Water has the power to purify, and to cool. This power brings objects and people into ritual states where they no longer have the power of extreme purity or pollution. It integrates them into the normal world. Here it is celebrated after women have removed the year's pollution associated with the household.

Karttik

Dark Half

1 to purnam (15) Karttik puja: for all of this month pious individuals rise early and bathe in cold water and worship the Tulasi tree (holy basil of Ocymum sanctum). On the full moon of this month it is considered especially meritorious if they can bathe and perform the puja in the sacred river Shipra at Ujjain.

Anyone can do this bathing which is also accompanied by a fast but it is especially popular among young girls. Older women often say they are too busy although many do it. Only one or two men perform the bathing. Interestingly the legends concerning it in the written tradition involve Tulasi as a female deity becoming the wife and/or lover of Visnu (cf. Crooke 1896: 110-111). Once again fasting and purification seem to be being put in the context of obtaining benevolent female powers, and in this case of winning a desirable husband, or lover.

4 Karva Cauth: women fast for the sake of their husbands and do not eat until the moon rises. This fast is observed by women from the Nai, Gari, Koli, Khunbi, Lodhi, Jatav, Darzi, Teli and Balai castes.

13 Dhan Teras (Wealth thirteenth): this is thought of as the first day of the Divali celebrations and as its name suggests centres around the worship of wealth. Laksmi is thought of as the goddess of wealth and so her image and picture is worshipped. Cattle are worshipped and the jewellry and coins belonging to family are worshipped. In practice all adult members of the family seem to be involved in the puja although the Camar, Koli, Khunbi, Lodhi, Rajputs, Jatav, Darzi, Teli, Thakurs and Balai say that this puja should only be done by men. It is interesting that men rather than women should be concerned with this kind of transactable wealth.[12]

The shop keepers in the village also hold a special puja in their shops on this day because of the association of this day with wealth. Like many of the shop keepers in Indore many also count this day as the last day of the accounting year (cf. Underhill 1921: 59).

Lamps are lighted on this evening and are kept alight on the following five nights.

15 amavas (15)

Divali Amavas: this day is the day of biggest celebrations in Indore but in the village it is quieter. Women finish whitewashing and cleaning their houses which they do at Divali and also at Naumi and then bathe and change into new clothes. The head of the household brings new clothes for his household (cf. Underhill 1921: 61). Special food is cooked on this day and in the evening pujas similar to those performed on Dhan Teras are performed. In addition to lamps being lit, fireworks are let off and it is customary among men to gamble and play cards late into the evening. Mayer records the singing of special hir songs and cow baiting taking place at this time but although informants commented that they had heard of such things in other villages no one remembered these things ever having been practiced in Ambakhedi.

Light Half

1

Gordhan (Cow dung wealth): this is the local name festival known elsewhere as Annakot - Gorbhadan (Mathur 1964: 171) and Gobardhan (Freed and Freed 1963: 88). It is basically a cattle festival with two components, the worship of cow dung and the

decoration and worship of cattle.[13] Married women of the household make images out of cow dung in a courtyard or path directly in front of the house. The images usually consist of three figures whom women refer to as Gordhan Baba, his mother-in-law and his wife. The figures are surrounded by little piles of cow dung balls which are said to represent sweet cakes. In addition, models of cows, women sitting at the stone hand-grinding mill, grain storage bins and other domestic articles are made.

Women then worship these images by annointing them with vermillion, flowers, a mixture of rice and milk and by lighting incense sticks. It is then left as it is until Dev Uthne Gyaras (see below) when it is used in the puja conducted on that date. In all castes except for the Jatav, the Nai and the Thakurs, it is the women and only women who both make and worship the images. In these other castes the women make the images and the men worship them.

Villagers do not articulate what the worship is about but the images and the close association of women with this section of the feast suggest that it is to do with the daily processes and life giving forces of domestic life. One caste, the Thakurs, make a slightly different design and associate Gordhan worship with Krsna. They make mounds of cow dung to represent hills rather than making the figures and they say that these hills represent the hill in Gokul, his birth place which Krsna lifted up to protect the people from Indra's

wrath. However the Thakurs are the only caste that associate this festival with Krsna.

The cattle are worshipped on this day not only by being given special food and having a tilak of vermillion on their heads but they are also decorated by having spots of coloured dye printed on them, their horns painted and peacock feathers arranged as headdresses. The men are largely responsible for this. Cowherds and other servants are given presents of clothes by their masters.

Again it is not clear why men should be associated with the cattle and women with the cow dung. This does reflect the division of labour between men and women in their agricultural tasks, in that men are largely responsible for herding the cattle and women for collecting cow dung which is used as a fuel as well as in ritual purification. But since women worship ploughs, but rarely do the ploughing it seems unlikely that the correspondence between the division of agricultural labour and division of ritual labour is exact.[14]

2 Bhai Duj (brother's second): this is the last day of the Divali season and on this day brothers come to touch their sister's feet and give them gifts of money. Sisters prepare meals for their brothers (cf. Underhill 1921: 63).

This seems to mark the auspicious tie between brother and sister, the feet touching indicating the special respect that a brother holds for his sister, perhaps in part due to the protection she bestows on him at Rakhi.[15]

11 Dev Uthne Gyaras (Gods' awakening eleventh): this marks the awakening of the gods after which marriages can take place and sugar cane can be cut for the first time (cf. Crooke 1896: 300). In the spot where the Gordhanpuja was observed men plant five sugar cane pieces in a mound of cow dung and then take five steps round the mound letting off fire crackers and then do arti to the pile of dung. Generally it is the men who walk round the mound and the women who perform the arti. The Brahman family differ in that here the Brahman woman puts food on the spot where Gordhan was worshipped and then puts a figure of Laksmi there and worships it.

It is not clear what the significance of men's role in this is. If Crooke is right in suggesting that the god concerned is the Great Traditional god Visnu it may be an example of men performing the major transactions with this god rather than women, be-because approach to Visnu is determined by purity and impurity rather than any other criteria.

Aghan No major festival

Pus No major festival

Magh

Light Half

1 Makar Samkramti: this marks the winter solstice (cf. Mayer 1973: 111). It is generally observed as a holiday within the village and many women return to their natal families

to celebrate it. Special food is cooked (ie. richer than usual) and the pujas that are done vary considerably according to the caste concerned. Some Rajput women worship a pile of cow dung they make by the well. Balai women told us that they worship the Tulasi tree. People say that the day is concerned with the prosperity of cattle and fields, but in general the symbolism of this feast is not clear.

Phagun

Dark Half

14 — Sivratri: this feast of Siva is not marked by any great celebration except by some particularly pious individuals who fast. Many women go to one of the large fairs held at Onkareshwar or in a neighbouring small town.

Light Half

purnam (15) to cait Dark Half 1 — Holi: the themes of this festival seem to be fertility and renewal (cf. Underhill 1921: 45). On the evening of this day the Balai caste have the job of preparing a large bonfire. They do this by 'stealing' wood and cow dung cakes from all the households of the village. At about eight in the evening the women of the household come to do a puja to the fire which they refer to as Holi Mata. The patel's wife should come first.[16] She walks round the fire five times and then does obeisances to it with the corner of her sari before putting various offerings inside it including rice, jaggery, roti and small pieces of cloth and white sweets. Women from all castes do this except the Jatav who have their own separate Holi fire and perform their own separate rite.

Some Balai women and men then sit near the Holi fire watching during the whole night to make sure no one tries to light it for it should be lighted by the patel just after dawn. Apparently in some years it has actually been lighted before this time. People believe that if a man is impotent and he manages to light the fire before the patel he will be cured.

The next morning just before dawn the patel comes and sprinkles the fire with coloured water and vermillion powder and puts a coconut in it and then he sets light to the fire. Men then come from each household with a tray in which area pot of coloured water, some salt, some wheat, a coconut and necklaces made of sweets and cow dung. The coconut, the necklaces and the grains of wheat are raked through the fire to purify them. Ashes from the fire are mixed in with the salt and the men smear the faces of those around them with vermillion powder and ashes. On their return home the coconut is broken and given as prasad, the salt is given to the cattle, wheat from the wheat just harvested may be made into flour and used for the first time. The necklaces are given to the children, who wear them.

At midmorning the patel leads a procession of men round the village starting at the fire. As the men process round the village they are doused with coloured water by watching women and children. They visit each house where a death has occurred and the patel, the Nai and a male affine of the house concerned smear red vermillion on the heads of all those in the household. This marks the

end of the widow's exclusion from wedding rituals and other auspicious rites such as birth rites. Then the men sit in the temple and sing hymns for a while before returning home to eat.

Then there is a pause in the formal celebrations and people play throwing colour at one another. Some of the Bhilala men dress up as women and dance in the village and some low caste women come from house to house singing insults and begging jaggery and money from people.

After everyone has eaten and rested the women gather outside the patel's house and led by the patel's wife process round the village singing songs insulting various men within the community. Like the men they get doused in coloured water. At each house where a death has occurred the patel's wife stops and with the Nai woman and a female affinal relative goes in and smears colour on the heads of the women of the household and tells them to stop weeping. Then the women go to the Holi fire and they make obeisances to the fire, sprinkle it with coloured water 'to cool it', walk round it five times and then empty out their pots of coloured water completely and clean them with ashes from the fire. The low caste women make obscene jokes about high caste women.

After all this the women go together to a well just outside the village where they wash themselves and indulge in rowdy water play with one another. Then they sit in a house of a woman of a nearby Rajput household and sing bawdy songs and make obscene jokes

about themselves and the men of the village until the barber women and the hostess together distribute jaggery. They may visit several other households to receive jaggery in this way before returning home.

In the evening those men and women who have made vows, usually concerning the health of relatives and children walk across coals placed in front of a pole known as Gul BaBa.

From this day for the next five days onwards parties of low caste men and also separate parties of women go round the village singing insulting songs known as geriyã and are given jaggery and/or money by various householders. Play with coloured water also occurs over the following five days. Usually it is played by men with men, or women with women, and less often between men and women. It does not occur much between high castes and low castes. People said that formerly it did but these days tensions within the village are so great that people are fearful of these games turning into disputes. Also if the head of household has died male members of his son's wife's natal family will go to visit him one night in the next five nights and sing insulting songs to the family.

5 Ramg Pamcami: the concluding day of all the Holi festivities and games and is the occasion for much rowdy water play.

The Holi festival and symbols are too complex to be analysed in detail here and indeed analysis can be attempted at a number of different levels (see for example Underhill 1921: 44ff and Marriot 1966). Also the description

of the Holi rites given here is somewhat truncated. Given that a main concern of the thesis is the social construction of fertility and sexuality and the way this effects women's role and their position between kin groups the following observations seem relevant:

(i) The Holi fire is analagous to a funeral pyre. This seems evident from some of the myths associated with this fire. Underhill records that the fire is said by some to commemorate the occasion when 'Hiranyakaśipu, a demon, the father of Holika and Pralhāda, incensed by his son's devotion to Vishnu, commanded his daughter Holikā to take her brother on her lap and burn him to death, but by Vishnu's interposition Holikā was burnt and Pralhāda escaped unhurt' (Underhill 1921: 45).

This myth was known to at least some of the villagers. In addition certain customs explicable in terms of this analogy. The Balai who build the Holi fire are traditionally the caste that collect wood for the cremation pyre. Men light the fire and women do not. This together with the practices involving mourners suggest that at a certain level Holi is associated with themes concerning death.

(ii) Holi is associated with fertility and life. The fire is associated with male potency. There is also an underlying theme of fertility in the purification of the first wheat, the giving of necklaces to promote the health of children and the giving of special salt to the cattle. So the fire is associated with both death and life.

(iii) The festival is also associated with disorderly aspects of sexuality, the most obvious expression being in the bawdy jokes that characterise this period. The general disorderliness and rowdiness of the occasion arereminiscent of the disorderliness of the turmeric smearing that takes place as part of the wedding rituals. Elsewhere too, in the rain making rituals described in the chapter on kumari disorderly behaviour has been associated with fertility.

(iv) There is a clustering of themes centering round death and renewal through fertility. The visits of the affines to the homes of mourners both in the patel's procession and in parties which go to sing insults seems to tie in with this. For as was argued in the chapter on funerals affines promise renewal and continuity of life, but only at the expense of the death of some of the members of the household.

(v) Women's role at Holi is more obviously concerned with ritual washing and cooling than men's. This would seem to correspond to what has previously been argued about women mediating between dangerous and non-dangerous aspects of their sexuality and with ideas about their making the sacred world ritually neutral-integrating its powers into daily life.

7 Sitala Satmi: the festival of Sitala Satmi involves women worshipping a malevolent female goddess with turmeric. Śītalā Mata is worshipped all over north and central India and is believed to cause both small pox and chicken pox. When either of these diseases is present, people refer to the fact that the 'mother has

come' (small pox is called 'big mother' and chicken pox 'little mother'). She is a goddess who is not associated with any particular god as consort as Wadely points out. In the village, her worship contrasts with that of Gangaur, an incarnation of Parvati, Siva's wife. When images of Gangaur are worshipped at a festival shortly after Sitala Mata, Gangaur is always made in the image of a married woman with all the trappings associated with suhag. Sitala is worshipped as a tree. Villagers see Gangaur as the antithesis of the malevolent Sitala since she is not worshipped in houses where chicken pox or formerly small pox has occurred within the last twelve months. Her auspiciousness and married state contrasts with the more ambivalent characteristics of Sitala.

The name Sitala literally means 'she who loves cool' and it is applied somewhat ironically for the disease with which she is associated are linked with hot fevers. The worship of Sitala by women on Sitala Satmi seems largely concerned with appeasing the goddess with cooling things. No food is cooked in houses on this day for fear the heat will anger the goddess. Women who have children whose house has been affected by 'the mother' come to one tree which is her shrine and offer various things to her. The most striking of which is turmeric which they offer by making five hand prints and then five sets of finger prints on the tree itself.

The use of turmeric in a ritual where the goddess loves cool things is interesting for as we have seen earlier turmeric is associated with the heat of fertility at weddings.

It is unlikely that turmeric is dissociated from ideas about fertility and life giving forces in this context. Apart from informants saying that it is for the protection of children, after the goddess has been worshipped, Mai Mata the goddess of the fields is worshipped and women make small 'fields' put turmeric, vermillion and rice on them and plough them with their fingers (see above comment on Hal Chath). Informants said that when the turmeric is used at weddings it is hot but in this ritual it is cold. I would suggest that the key to an understanding of this use of turmeric is its association with auspicious social sexuality. At the wedding when sexual and erotic principles are balanced with other forces it is auspicious for turmeric to be hot. Here when it is destructive female force which needs controlling turmeric is seen as auspicious and cooling. As we have shown in the chapter on birth, water enables a woman to pass from positive or negatively charged ritual states to harmless neutality. Similarly turmeric as a symbol of social sexuality can be either hot or cold depending on the kind of mediation needed to create auspiciousness.

10 Dasami Mata: women worship the pipal[17] tree by making handprints on it in turmeric paste as they did for the Sitala Mata puja. They also walk round it one hundred and eight times as part of the puja. Another special characteristic of the puja is a string which the women tie ten knots in and dye in turmeric paste and then untie the knots and tie the thread around their wrists. They also worship Khoti Mata by 'ploughing' a small piece of ground with their

fingers and putting turmeric paste and vermillion on it. Stories associated with this puja tell how it gave the power of long life and prosperity to families where women did the fast.

Many women also worship and make new brooms on this day and put handprints of turmeric paste on the doorframe. Women also plant wheat seedlings which they worship in front of the figure of Gangaur on the fourth day of cait.

The tree worship and broom puja are done only by married women and like so many other pujas of this sort seem to indicate the beneficial power of married women when they fast and perform this kind of work, ie. the auspiciousness of their social sexuality. The brooms are said to be Laksmi and their worship is ineresting given what has already been argued about water and women in purification rites, that is that they seem to have the power to separate and mediate between positive and negative aspects of sexuality.

Notes

1. Families do not observe festivals if a family member has died on that particular day.

2. Two types of reference have been made in the appendix, one is to other writers whose arguments seem pertinent to my own and the second is when my attention has been drawn to other rituals in other parts of India which seem similar to one observed. The reference to work in other parts of India is not the result of systematic analysis of all the available material but indicates that the results may have wider implications than the study of the Malwa region of which it is part. However testing this out would require further analysis which cannot be undertaken at this point.

3. There is a possible explanation for the confusion over the naming of this day. That is that it reflects the position of Malwa as a region which is influenced by both northern and southern cultural traits. In Malwa, villagers follow a calendrical purnimanta system. The month beginning with the dark half, the new moon (amavas) occurs in the middle of the month. In Bengal, South India and Maharastra the animanta system is followed where the month begins with the light half. As Underhill writes 'It will be seen from the above that the light halves of the months are always known by by the same names under both Animanta and Purnimanta systems but the names of the dark halves differ. Ceremonies appointed for a certain day will be held on the same day all over India but the name by which the day is designated will differ according to the system followed' (Underhill 1921: 22). Thus according to the animanta system this Bhadom Tij is in fact 'Savan Tij'. Thus the confusion over naming may reflect the influences from the south and Maharastra that occur in this region as a whole.

4. Interestingly Lyn Bennet (1976a: 195) describes a woman's festival that seems to be organised around the same themes, that occurs at this time in Nepal. The Nepal festival is more elaborate but also seems to centre on the theme of female sexuality.

5. This is the second Ganesa Cauth in bhadom - the other occurs in the dark half.

6. This is the second Hal Chath in bhadom - the other occurs in the light half.

7. The precise identity of this figure is not clear. The villagers have a story which goes as follows. There was a Rajput who was going to visit his father-in-law and on the way he met a snake. The snake wanted to bite him but he bargained with the snake and said 'please first let me visit my father-in-law and then I will let you bite me'. On returning from his father-in-law he was beaten and robbed. The snake wanted to bite only an unscarred portion of Tejaji's body and so when he met with Tejaji he bit him on the tongue. Tejaji died. After his death his wife became a sati by throwing herself on the funeral pyre. It seems to be on account of this myth that some people believe worship of Tejaji to be particularly effective in the case of snake bite. Barker (1979) recounts a more elaborate version of this story which is apparently current in Rajasthan.

8. Underhill also mentions this ritual. She describes it as a man's ritual only and identifies the object of the worship as Ananta - a snake or form of Visnu. If performed for 14 years in succession the fast 'will give long life and fulfill every desire' (Underhill 1921: 122).

9. In this context the following comments by Das are interesting. 'The analysis of the data on domestic rituals strongly suggest that the sacred in Hindu belief and ritual should be conceptualised as divided with reference to the opposition of life and death....It will be seen that at one level, the sacred associated with life is kept completely separate from the sacred associated with death as in the injunction that no weddings should be performed in the month of sraddha when the ancestors are being propitiated or in the rule that a pregnant woman should not be allowed to visit the house in which a death has taken place' (Das 1976: 251-52). Kumari it seems are not associated with death at all, while a married woman is more likely to be associated with death as in rites to the ancestors in their natal group.

10. Occasionally women do become mediums with the power to cast out malevolent spirits. Informants admitted that this was possible but argued it was rare. Interestingly a case of such a female medium has occurred in a village five miles away from Ambakhedi (Henry Banard pers. comm.). However although this female medium held sessions to help others, she did not take a leading role in the Naumi procession and indeed came forward to be blessed by the male medium who led the procession.

11. Wadley writes 'males are the leaders of most public rituals' (1977: 127) and: 'Women as non-specialists are 'invisible' religious practitioners since most of their observances are performed non-publicly (in the home or 'domestic' sphere) and their role is not textually sanctioned'; (ibid. 130).

12. The whole question of the relation of women's role in ritual and how it corresponds to their position in the economic and political structure is complex and beyond the scope of this analysis. However the worship of wealth in this form by men at Divali raises some interesting questions. In many societies it has been suggested that women produce material goods while men exchange them (see for example Strathern 1972). Thus men use the goods produced by women to build up their power in the political arena. Whether the same can be said for the position of women in Ambakhedi is open to debate but it is true as we have shown in chapter 2 that women on the whole do not own land, do not engage in marketing on any large scale and the formal ideology militates against this. This is why the worship of transactable durable goods by men at Divali seems revealing for it suggests one way in which values associated with economic activities affect the religious sphere.

13. Crooke cites Ibbetson's Punjab Ethnography as containing a similar description of Gordhan in the Punjab (Crooke 1896: 120).

14. It seems likely that in this instance the cow is a symbol of transactable wealth. The plough as I have suggested in my comments on Hal Chath seems rather to be a symbol of women's mediating function, rather than their performance of this task.

15. Crooke makes the following comments about Divali. 'The original basis of the feast seems to have been the idea that on this night the spirits of the dead revisit their homes which are cleaned and lighted for their reception. Now it is chiefly observed in honour of Laksmi the goddess of wealth and good luck who is propitated by gambling....

Immediately following this festival is Bhaiyya Duj or 'Brothers' second, 'when sisters make a mark on the foreheads of their brothers and cause them to eat five grains of gram. These must be swallowed whole, not chewed, and bring length of days. The sister then makes her brother sit facing the east, and feeds him with sweet meats, in return for which he gives her a present' (Crooke 295-6). The idea of the dead visiting the homes is not something that is found at a conscious level in the beliefs of the villagers at Divali and seems more related to the themes involved in Solah Sraddh. However given what has been suggested in chapter 8 about the auspicious relation between brother and sister it seems appropriate that the festival should end with this entirely auspicious male-female relationship marked in this way. The festival described by Crooke shows more clearly than the one observed in Ambakhedi that the festival has an underlying theme about the benefits a sister can provide for her brother.

16. Holi is the one occasion apart from the rain making rite which the patel's wife has a distinctive role. However the role of the patel's wife is confined to leading women in activities that are seen as specifically female, she does not represent the village in the way that the patel does at Naumi or Dassara.

17. Crooke also notes that devotion to the Pipal Tree is common. He describes how it is variously associated with Brahma, Visnu and Siva. He also mentions a rite in which women worship the tree by walking round it one hundred and eight times and says that this is linked to the tale of raja Nikunjali and his queen Sartyavratiu who won her husband by her devotion to the sacred tree. Hence devotion to the tree is supposed to promote wedded happiness (Crooke 1896: 99).

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GLOSSARY WITH DIACRITICS

ācchat pācchat	game played in marriage rituals
achūt	untouchable
amāvas	new moon
āno	the consummation ritual
animanta	Hindu calendrical system
ārtī	worship of deity etc. with lights
āśrama	a stage of life in Hindu religion
aśuddh	impure
ātmā	soul, spirit
bahan	sister
bahū	daughter-in-law
bān	money given to bride/groom's father at weddings
bānā baithanā	the installation of the bride/groom at marriage
bānā jhelnā	giving gifts by friends to the bride/groom at marriage
banaulā	procession of bride/groom in the wedding
band karnā	to close
bārāt	groom's bridal party
bārāt milnā	ritual greeting of the groom's bridal party
betī	daughter.
bhābhī	brother's wife
bhagavān	god
bhāībandh	clan or lineage
bhīr	heavy
bhūt	spirit
bichiyā	toe ring
bir	memorial to man who died fighting
brahmacārī	a celibate student the first āśrama
būā	father's sister

carnā	clay pot filled with cow dung and barley seeds given to new mothers to drink
cauk	i. auspicious pattern drawn for rite
	ii. cooking place
	iii. avenue square
caukkebāhar	'literally outside the cauk' term used for women polluted by menstruation or childbirth
caukidār	watchman
chappati	wheat flour cake
chelā	pupil
curail	female spirit of a woman who has died an untimely death
dahej	dowry
dahlī churāī	ritual involving leaving the threshold
dākin	witch
dākinī	witch like
devar	husband's younger brother
dharmā	duty - a concept with particular connotations in Hinduism
doṣ	misfortune
dulen kā taiyār honā	preparation of the bridegroom in marriage
ek	one
ekī bekī	game played at marriage
gagarā	full skirt worn under half sari worn in Malwa and Rajasthan
gamdā	dirty
gāntā	mortuary rite
gaunā	consummation ceremony
gaurnī	mortuary rite
geriyā	songs sung at Holi festival
ghar	household
gharsarī	rite for protection of house
ghatha bāmdhanā	ritual tying of a thread in marriage

ghī	clarified butter
ghur	jaggery
god bharāī	filling the lap ritual
god jhelnā	gift giving to bride/groom by friends at a wedding
gotrā	clan but see discussion in chapter 2
gram pamcayat	village council
grhastha	the householder āśrama
gun	a quality in Hindu meta-physics
haldī	turmeric
haldī mahurt	ritual crushing of turmeric at a wedding
haldī snān	ritual turmeric bath at a wedding
havā	wind/evil spirit
hir	songs sung at Divali
ijjat	honour
ijjatkibāt	a matter of honour
inām	gift/rent free land
jaccā	a woman in post delivery confinement
jamāī	son-in-law
janeū	the sacred thread
jāt	caste (see chapter 2)
jeth	husband's older brother
jethānī	husband's elder brother's wife
jījā	sister's husband
kaccā	food cooked with water and/or salt
kāmīn	a craftsman
kāmkan dora	game played in wedding
kanyā kumari	unmarried girl
kanyādān	the gift of a maiden
kaprepananvali	literally one wearing cloth, a term for a menstruating woman
karī	an anklet

kathā	sacred recitation
khal mittī	literally 'mischievous earth', a ritual at the wedding
khālsā	landlord free village
khānā	food
khāndān	clan/lineage (see chapter 2)
khīr	sweet rice and milk
khvāṅsa/khvāṅsī	real and classificatory brothers-in-law and sisters of spouse acting as aides at wedding
kismat	fate
kriya karm	mortuary rite
kul	lineage
kumārī	unmarried girl
kuṭumb	family (see chapter 2)
lagan	auspicious time, a wedding rite
lagan lenā	receiving the lagan, wedding rite
lagan patrī	writing the lagan, wedding rite
lāṛī	bride, son's wife, younger brother's wife
lugara	half sari worn by women over gagara
maikā	natal home
majdūr	wage labourer
mām	mother
māmerā	gifts from mother's natal gotra mates or others in this category
maṅgat	beggar, ascetic
māṅak khamb	figure in bridal canopy
maṇdap	marriage booth
maṇdap barsana	to cool the marriage booth wedding rite)
maṇdap gāṛanā	construction of the marriage booth (wedding rite)
mantra	Hindu prayer
mātā	mother
maur	headdress worn by groom at wedding

mausāl	uterine kin
mokṣa	release/salvation
moṭī	large
mukti	release/salvation
mul	ritual after birth
nām	reputation: name for posterity
nanand	husband's sister
nāthrā	remarriage
naukar	wage labourer
nikālnā	to take out
nikāsī	the leaving of the barat at marriage
nukatā	funerary feast
pad	food put in the mouth of the corpse
paglī	decorative design announcing the birth of a new baby
pagṛī	turban, a mortuary rite
pahavā rani	gift from bride's to groom's relatives
pakkā	food cooked in ghi
pāliyā	monument to a man dying a violent death
pamc	member of local administrative committee known as pancayat
parī	spirit of woman who died an untimely death
parivār	family
paṭavārī	village accountant
paṭel	headman
pati	husband
patikādharmā	dharmā of mature woman, literally 'duty of the husband'
patīvrat	chaste woman
peṭkābal	'literally hair of the stomach', hair of new baby
pherā	'steps', a wedding rite

pihar	natal home
pimḍ	figure made from flour used in wedding ritual
pīpal	sacred tree
pitṛ	ancestor
prajā	progeny
prasād	food offered to deity later distributed
pret	spirit of deceased
prītibhoj	love feast
puṇya	merit
pūrī	wheat cake fried in oil
pūrnam	full moon
pūrṇimā	full moon
pūrnimanta	Hindu calendrical system
rajas	the gun passion
rajasvalī	a woman with the gun rajas, a menstruating woman
rajogun	the gun rajas
raksa	protection
ratī	pleasure
roṭi	dry flour pancake
ṛṣi	sage
sādī	wedding
sagāī	engagement
saṁskāra	rites in life cycle
śárm	shame/modesty
sarpaṁc	head of council
sās	mother-in-law
sasur	father-in-law
sasurāl	conjugal home
satī	virtuous woman, or woman who immolates herself
sātnī	virtuous woman, one possessing the gun, sattva
sāt phera	seven steps (wedding rite)

sāttia	ritual performed at doorway after a child's birth
sattva	one of the four guns
sivcaunī	gifts made to bride at wedding
sok	co-wife
solah	sixteen
śraddh	rite of propitiation to the ancestors
strī	woman
strīkādharmā	duty of the woman
śūdra	untouchable
suhāg	auspicious marks of a married woman
sūraj	sun
sutak	impurity
tapasyā	austerity practiced by an ascetic
tej	crafty, cunning
tel cardhana	to annoint with oil (wedding rite)
tel utārnā	to remove oil
thandā karnā	to cool
tikā	auspicious red spot worn by women not in a state of pollution
toran	wooden frame of marriage booth
triśūla	trident
tulāsi	basil tree
tyohārī	gifts given at festivals
upanayan	initiation ceremony for twice born
ukedī	rubbish pit
varn	classical division of Hindu society

NAMES OF DEITIES WITH DIACRITICS

Agnī
Ambā Matā
Aṣṭmi Mātā
Bheru
Bijansan Mātā (Personnification of Durga)
Brahma
Cāmuṇḍā (Personnification of Durga)
Daśamī Mātā (10th day mother)
Durgā
Gangaur
Gumgā Matā (Deaf and Dumb Mātā)
Gul Baba (Lord of the Holi Swing)
Ganeśa
Kalkā Mātā (Personnification of Durga)
Khetī Mātā (field mother)
Kṛṣna
Lakṣmī
Mai Mātā
Marī Mātā
Pāliyā Baba
Pārvati
Rām
Rāvana
Sañjabai
Sasthi
Sati Mātā
Śiva
Śītalā
Viṣnu